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JOHN BUNYAN

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BY

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"The Philistines understand me not."

Grace Abounding.

JOHN BUNYAN

CHAPTER ONE

JOHN BUNYAN: BRAZIER OF BEDFORD

I

JOHN BUNYAN, author of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, was born at Elstow, in Bedfordshire, and baptized on the 30th of November, 1628. His father, Thomas Bonnionn (for so the name was spelled in the parish register), was a man of the labouring class, who derived no worldly advantage from the fact that he came of an ancient family, which had been established in the district for four centuries. His trade was that of a brazier, and he earned a precarious livelihood by mending pots and kettles for the neighbours round. Margaret Bentley, his second wife, was a frugal young woman of the same age as himself, and both of them, when they married, had lived in their native village for twenty-four years. In due course they were blessed with a little family of two boys and two girls, of whom John was the eldest.

It should not be difficult to reconstruct imaginatively the boyhood of John Bunyan. For the first few years his world would be bounded by Elstow itself, with its scattered group of half-timbered

barns and cottages; its village green, where the game of tip-cat was frequently played on Sundays; its familiar Moot Hall and market cross; its parish church and queerly detached tower, from whose high belfry there clashed occasionally a merry peal of bells. Not far off were the ever-alluring fish-ponds of Elstow Abbey, and the stately manor-house of Sir Thomas Hillersdon, whose handsome porch of elaborate Renaissance architecture fascinated the lad, and came to be regarded by him as the entrance to a veritable Palace Beautiful.

John, we may be sure, was a very wide-awake little boy, and he probably learned a great deal more out of doors than ever he did at school. He knew how the rooks wheeled their airy flight about the churchyard elms, dropping hoarse cries, cutting the air with their black wings, and pausing to decide on which tree they should alight. He also knew how the crows would settle awkwardly on the ploughed fields, and many a time he felt inclined to talk to them. The later author of *The Pilgrim's Progress* was probably, on the whole, more versed in the fauna and flora of Palestine than in those of his native Bedfordshire. His thoughts ran more often, and more instinctively, to the rose of Sharon, the cedars of Lebanon, and the hyssop that springeth from the wall in Jerusalem, than they did to the primroses and buttercups that gleamed so brightly in the Elstow meadows. Yet we know from his books, and particularly from his poetry addressed to children, that John Bunyan as a boy must have observed with sharp eyes the habits of robins, moles, owls, spiders, and other small creatures. On one occasion

he hit an adder on the head with a stick, and then, greatly daring, forced its mouth open and plucked out its sting with his own fingers.

As the years advanced, little John Bunyan would venture timidly beyond Elstow, and travel as far as the town of Bedford, a mile or so to the north. To reach it he would have to cross the sleepy, sluggish, meandering River Ouse, on a rambling old thirteenth-century bridge of seven arches, with a gloomy and frowning prison built over its northern gateway. Beyond that were the cobbled, miry streets of the quaint old town itself, a town made up of stray thatched houses with shuttered windows to them, connected here and there by glades of orchard trees, laden with green plums mostly too sour for a boy's taste. Among the marvels of Bedford were a real maypole and a pillory with stocks for malefactors, besides a second or county prison, at the corner of High Street and Silver Street, where strange-looking bags hung from the grated windows, imploring a gift of alms from passers-by. Usually Bedford appeared a quiet, sleepy place to the boy from Elstow, as dull and lazy as the river that flowed through it; but it would wake up sometimes, on market-days, for instance, and also at Quarter Sessions, when judges rolled up to the Guildhouse in grand carriages; and there was always a lively stir in the town when people came together to elect one or other of the two Members of Parliament, who voiced their grievances in far-off London.

If ever John chanced to find himself in Bedford on such exciting occasions as those, he would have to hurry home betimes, as the bridge over the

River Ouse closed at ten o'clock, and no guiding lights were ever to be seen in Bedford streets. These indeed were not to be illuminated till Bunyan was twenty-eight. Besides, to be out at night was to be exposed to the danger of beggars, robbers, and other "sturdy rogues," of whom *The Pilgrim's Progress* more than once makes mention.[1] The boy —who knows?—might even be seized by gipsies and carried off, struggling in vain beneath the dark folds of their capacious cloaks. And then, what about the hobgoblins? and the quagmires by the way? and the dreams of hellish fiends which began as early as his ninth year to affright poor Bunyan, even when he was safely tucked beneath the blankets? After all, for a boy rather subject to timid fears, it was best not to stray too far from home. Elstow, moreover, offered abundant delights within its own borders. A glorious fair, resplendent with gay booths and other dazzling attractions, visited the place once a year, and had done so from time immemorial. And there were always the bellows of his father's forge to play with, and the sparks to send flying, and the hammer to beat rhythmically upon the ringing anvil.

While the boyhood of Bunyan was slowly passing amid such tranquil scenes as these, stirring events were taking place in the wider arena of the national life. The vital questions at issue between Charles, Laud, and Strafford on the one hand, and Cromwell, Pym, and Hampden on the other, were rapidly

[1] "The seventeenth century was the golden age of British highwaymen." C. H. Firth, in *John Bunyan*, an English Association Leaflet, p. 15.

advancing from a controversy of words to a clash of swords. John Bunyan was born in the very year in which the King was presented with a Petition of Right, demanding that there should be no taxation of Englishmen without consent of Parliament. He was two years old when the Puritan emigration to New England was at its height; five, when William Laud was made Archbishop of Canterbury; nine, when the payment of ship-money was refused by John Hampden. Only the faintest echoes of these reverberating events would reach the youth of Elstow. He would be as much or as little affected by them as the calm and placid surface of some secluded cove might be affected by a tumult of great waters in the broad Atlantic. Bunyan may possibly have witnessed the setting out of a cavalcade of horsemen, when 2000 men from Bedfordshire presented a petition to Parliament in 1641, begging that all evil councillors and delinquents might be punished, and that there might be established "a faithfull magistracie as well as a painfull ministrie." But what could a lad of twelve make of these things?

Public affairs would come much more conspicuously within the range of John Bunyan's comprehension when the standard of King Charles was raised at Nottingham in 1642, and bands of mounted troopers could be seen cantering hurriedly through the streets of Bedford. Matters reached a crisis two years later. An ordinance of Parliament, in 1644, demanded "that the city of Bedford, within fourteen days, shall send unto the garrison at Newport 225 able and armed men for souldiers." As Bunyan was sixteen at the time, and therefore now eligible

for military service, it is probable that he was included with others in this levy. Doubtless the youth was willing, nay eager, to go. There was something in Bunyan's nature that loved a fight. Who, indeed, at the age of sixteen, would not gladly embrace the opportunity to handle a pike and see something of the world, rather than stop at home, mending pots and pans, in a sleepy old village? Moreover, Bunyan had special reasons for being tired of Elstow. His mother had recently died, and she had been followed to the grave a month later by her little daughter Margaret, the playmate of John's childhood. Then, a bare month after that, when his dear mother's body was but newly laid to rest beneath the sod, his father had taken to himself his third wife. After such events, home could never again be what it had been before to the sensitive and growing lad. Without reluctance, therefore, yet with a heavy heart all the same, John would pack his kit, shoulder his musket, and march off with the rest to Newport Pagnell, ready to strike a blow for his country's freedom.

II

Bunyan remained in the army from November 1644 till June 1647, being sent hither and thither on various minor skirmishes and expeditions by Sir Samuel Luke, a gallant and godly warrior, the original of Butler's Hudibras, and one of the Members for Bedford in the Long Parliament. How he fared during those months we do not know. The

later mind of Bunyan, so far as his writings reveal it, took a religious view of this period of his life's history and noted chiefly the occasions on which he had been marvellously preserved. Once, it seems, he fell into a creek of the sea and came nigh to being drowned. On another occasion his place in the ranks was taken by someone else, who was shot through the head during a siege and so died. Bunyan saw the hand of God in these things and rejoiced with trembling. In the main, however, we can trace the army experiences of our author only in the material it provided for his later imaginative writing, in the array of weapons filling the armoury of the House Beautiful, in the deadly conflict of Christian with Apollyon, in the valiant bearing of Greatheart, Boanerges, and Captain Credence, and in the marchings and counter-marchings, the ambuscades, challenges, and loud trumpetings of *The Holy War*.

Between his eighteenth and his twentieth year Bunyan was in the trough of the wave. Like many another youth newly demobilised from army service, he scarce knew what to do with himself. It was hard for one who had played a part in great events, in however humble a capacity, to return to drudgery at his father's forge. Not unnaturally he took to evil courses. Bunyan was free from some of the excesses incident to youth. He was no drinker, and he stoutly averred that he never gave way to the vice of unchastity. But there was no one to beat him in all the district round for swearing. The army doubtless encouraged his indulgence in this evil habit, but Bunyan tells us he was addicted to it

from childhood. If we are to believe his own testimony in the matter, his volubility and skill in the utterance of weird blasphemies astonished even the local experts in this accomplishment and made them tremble in their shoes. Clearly the brazier's son was resolved to be the most dare-devil young fellow in the whole neighbourhood, a shameless ringleader in all manner of ungodliness.

When he was about twenty years of age John Bunyan did a strange thing. He married. It required some courage for a youth just out of his teens to undertake the support of a wife by mending pots and pans, especially as she herself brought neither dish nor spoon with her as a dowry. But it should be remembered that Bunyan, missing the companionship of his younger sister, and having little in common with his new step-mother, perhaps with his father also, began now to desire a home of his own. Maybe, too, he was wearying of his blasphemous ways, for it is to his credit that he chose a wife who was not only devout herself but also descended from godly parents. We do not know where this young woman came from, or even what her name was, but she exercised a sobering, steadying influence on her husband, particularly by bringing with her in her trunk two little books of practical religion. Of these one was *The Plaine Man's Pathway to Heaven, wherein every man may clearly see whether he shall be saved or damned*, by Arthur Dent, a parish minister in Essex. The other was *The Practice of Pietie, directing a Christian how to walke that he may please God*, by Lewis Bayly, a bishop of Bangor in King James's time.

Bunyan read these books with an air of condescension at first, and partly in order to gratify the whims of his darling young wife. It amused him to resume his long-neglected habit of reading, and he found in these two popular devotional treatises " some things that were something pleasing " to him, but that was all. Gradually, however, he became more interested. The dialogue form of composition fascinated him ; the pithy sententious wisdom and quaint proverbial sayings mysteriously laid hold of him ; something in the moral urgency and vehemence of the writers arrested his attention. The result was that Bunyan became a changed man. The quondam village blasphemer became a worshipper ; and twice every Sunday, as the bells in their high tower rang out their joyous clamour, Bunyan would take his young wife on his arm and go to church with the foremost. There he would adore " the High place, Priest, Clerk, Vestment, Service, and what else, belonging to the Church, counting all things holy that were therein contained " ; and would listen attentively to the Rev. Christopher Hall, an Episcopal clergyman with Puritan leanings, discoursing perhaps on the sinfulness of playing games on the village green on Sundays.

Thus far could Mrs Bunyan lead her husband, but no farther. She could bring him to church, but she could not bring him to what he himself would afterwards describe as a state of grace. She could make him feel proud in the presence of other villagers, but not, alas, humbled in the presence of a holy God. This service was reserved for certain other poor women who were then enjoying the

ministry of the Rev. John Gifford in Bedford. Bunyan overheard these women conversing one morning by a sunny doorstep, and their language somewhat puzzled and disconcerted him. He himself was already a brisk talker on religion and convinced that God could not choose but be as well pleased with him as with any man in England. But here were three or four poor folk who revealed an acquaintance with depths of spiritual experience such as he had never fathomed. They spoke of the corruption of their own hearts, the power of the new birth, and the sweetness of divine grace, with such spirituality and so much pleasantness of Scripture language, that Bunyan was completely staggered. He felt as Robert Burns might have felt if someone had suggested to him in his early days that he was not the "Old Hawk" he thought himself to be, but an inexpert novice and tyro in the art of love-making. If Burns felt sure he was a specialist in love, Bunyan no less thought himself a specialist in religion. Could it be that he was self-deceived, and that his righteousness was no more than a mockery and a sham ?

III

Then it was that the deepest fountains of his nature were stirred and the floods that were in him began to issue forth. The poor women of Bedford did for Bunyan what neither his wife nor the Rev. Christopher Hall could do for him. They did for him what the lowly and obscure Ananias at

Damascus did for Saul of Tarsus. They opened his eyes to himself and to the truth as it is in Jesus. Bunyan now entered upon a period of tumult which was to give him no respite for the next two or three years. The rough, military warfare he had experienced in the army was to be as nothing to the far more awful spiritual warfare he was now to experience within his own breast. Bunyan became henceforth a God-intoxicated man, a man possessed, even tormented, by the passionate desire to come to terms with the Author of his being. How could a man be justified before God? What was the relation between faith and works? If human righteousness at the best was but as filthy rags, where was there a robe of spotless and sufficient righteousness, and how was such a covering to be obtained? These absorbing questions were to occupy the mind of Bunyan for many a long day and many a sleepless night.

Being thus in great distress of mind regarding his spiritual condition, it was natural that Bunyan should turn for help to the same source from which the poor women of Bedford had themselves derived so much comfort and illumination. What he most needed, at this juncture of his career, was some pilot who should steer his troubled bark through the rough seas on which he was now entering. Had Bunyan been introduced at this stage to some kindly Jesuit or father-confessor, one skilled to know the complicated windings of the human heart, and at the same time deeply acquainted with the age-long pastoral experience and doctrinal teachings of the historic Church—someone of the school of Lancelot

Andrewes, for example—who can tell what the result might have been? How much self-torment and suspense, how much weary tossing to and fro, he might have been spared! As things happened, Bunyan was now, at the age of twenty-three, committed to the guidance of a former major of the Royalist army, a roystering Cavalier, who had been captured at the battle of Maidstone in 1648, and condemned to death, but who had escaped from prison, lain for three days in the bottom of a ditch, and finally found his way to Bedford, where for a time he practised as a physician, but "abode still very vile and debauched in life, being a great drinker, gamester, and swearer," till he was soundly converted to faith in the Gospel, and in due course became installed as first pastor of the Congregational church in Bedford in 1650.

We are somewhat taken aback by this amazingly variegated and crowded record; yet, strangely enough, this was the man appointed by God to act the part of Evangelist to John Bunyan and to direct his steps to the Celestial City. Gifford led Bunyan into an orderly exposition of the principal doctrines of Christianity, as he understood them, and threw him back on personal wrestling with God in the desperate embrace of faith. Pope, priest, presbyter were (so to speak) bidden to stand aside while this awakened sinner, with the sole help of the Bible he carried in his hand, together with the prayers of the godly who knelt by his side, must learn to face the awful holiness of his Maker, and make what terms he could with the grace of his Redeemer.

Such was the man, then, who dominated the

personality of Bunyan from his twenty-third to his twenty-seventh year. "Mr Gifford's doctrine," he wrote, "was much for my stability." Bunyan made his acquaintance probably in 1651, attended his church regularly thereafter, was publicly baptized by him in the River Ouse in 1653, and remained his close friend till his death in 1655. Congregationalism in those days, it should be remembered, was firmly established in the seats of the mighty. According to the Cromwellian settlement of religion, Episcopacy was superseded as an imposed official form of church government, and the pastoral oversight of the people in the various parishes of the country was entrusted, by Commissioners of State, to godly and pious men of any denomination. "No articles of faith were prescribed, no subscription was enforced, and no mention was made by name either of Episcopacy, Presbyterianism, or Congregationalism, or of the question of baptism." [1] In Bedford, as it happened, the right of presentation to the living of St John's parish church was vested in the mayor and corporation of the town; and when, in the year 1653, the vicar of that church was sequestered and deposed from office, it seemed the most natural thing in the world that "holy Mr Gifford," for the previous three years pastor of the Congregational church worshipping in Bedford, and now a man of unblemished reputation, should be appointed to the incumbency thus rendered vacant. The community to which Bunyan belonged, therefore, became part and parcel of the State Church of the Commonwealth, while

[1] Dr John Brown, in *John Bunyan: his Life, Times, and Work*, p. 89.

still adhering to Congregational principles and practice. During all this time, Gifford was both Evangelist and Interpreter to Bunyan. In the study of his rectory at St John's he unfolded to him the whole counsel of God, as Puritanism understood it, and laid the foundations of the spiritual faith which finds such rich expression in *Grace Abounding* and in *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

Events of importance in the life of Bunyan occurred in 1655, when he was twenty-seven. On the death of his first wife in that year he removed his home from Elstow to Bedford; he also began the practice of public speaking. This latter step was one he took with great hesitancy and after much searching of heart. Bunyan was acutely conscious of his mean social standing and his lack of a good education. That an unlettered workman should take upon himself to instruct others in spiritual matters would, he knew, be regarded in some quarters as the height of presumption. Would he not be far better employed mending kettles than attempting to repair the souls of men? It did therefore much "dash and abash" Bunyan's spirit to speak the word of exhortation to his brethren. Yet he felt "a secret pricking forward to the work" that could not be gainsaid. After all, were not the first apostles "unlearned and ignorant men"? Yet they were charged with a great message and mightily owned of God in the converting of sinners and edifying of saints. Now that he had been truly grounded in the faith by John Gifford, surely it was right and proper that he should pass on the good news to others, especially as at this very

juncture, in 1655, John Gifford himself was taken away by death, and the flock to which he ministered so faithfully was now become as sheep without a shepherd. The tempestuous torrent of Bunyan's religious life had already, so to speak, traversed its rocky and narrow gorge, and was now issuing into a broad and tranquil stream. Was it not right that it should be made to irrigate the thirsty plain around it?

Whatever doubts Bunyan may have had on these matters were set to rest immediately he began to preach. Clearly he was "a man sent from God." The instantaneous approval of his auditors, and the manifest blessings that followed his spoken word, set the seal of the Spirit upon his endeavours. When, therefore, in response to importunate requests, he did at last "discover his gift" among the brethren, "they did solemnly protest, as in the sight of the great God, that they were both affected and comforted, and gave thanks to the Father of Mercies for the grace bestowed on me." As the matter was pithily put by John Burton, Gifford's successor in the pastorate of the church at Bedford: "This man is not chosen out of an earthly university, but out of the heavenly university, the Church of Christ. . . . He hath through grace taken these three heavenly degrees, to wit, union with Christ, the anointing of the Spirit, and experiences of the temptation of Satan, which do more fit a man for that mighty work of preaching the Gospel than all university learning and degrees that can be had."

This "mighty work of preaching the Gospel" now became Bunyan's chief concern. He spoke to large crowds in the open air before the Moot Hall

in Bedford. He publicly denounced the Quakers for presuming to set up the Inner Light as a rival authority to that of Scripture. He even held forth in some of the parish churches of the district, and at the request of the rector himself, one William Dell, a master of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, delivered from the pulpit of Yelden parish church the only address given to the people on Christmas Day, 1659.

IV

This date ominously reminds us that we have now reached a turning-point alike in the career of Bunyan and in the history of English Puritanism. The restoration of Charles II was at hand. After the death of Cromwell, in 1658, no one could be found to maintain in good repair the spiritual fabric he had so laboured to construct, and the edifice of Puritanism began to crumble. Even before 1660 it was fast falling into decay. The requirements of the godly party within the nation had proved to be too strenuously exacting, and the majority of the people now desired a change to laxer ways. There was a general longing for the old-established form of the national religion, including a return to none but episcopally authorised ministries and the use of the Book of Common Prayer.

Such a spirit could not readily brook the presence of upstart braziers, professing to be converted, as expounders of the Word in any consecrated sanctuary, or indeed elsewhere. Charles had promised

toleration to tender consciences in these matters, but the Earl of Clarendon was at his side to see to it that these promises should eventually prove no more than a form of words. In the meanwhile, there were old statutes of Elizabeth's time to fall back upon, including the still unrepealed Conventicle Act of 1593, and these could conveniently be put into force before the passing of the Act of Uniformity in 1662.

John Bunyan was one of the first to suffer from this change of attitude. In May, 1659, he was preaching in a barn in Cambridgeshire, when in walked the Rev. Thomas Smith, rector of Gawcat, professor of Arabic in the University of Cambridge, reader in rhetoric, lecturer at Christ's College, and keeper of the university library. At the close of the service this visitor challenged Bunyan's right to preach the Gospel; and, when that protest proved unavailing, he attempted to raise a hue and cry against him by means of a printed letter addressed to a Mr E. of Taft. In this epistle he urged that correspondent "for God's sake, for Christ's sake, for the Church's sake, for your reputation's sake, for your children's sake, for your country's sake, for your own immortal soul's sake, to consider these things sadly and seriously, not to think a tinker more infallible than the pure Spouse of Christ, and to foresee what will be the sad consequences, both to the souls, and bodies, and estates of both you and your children in following such strangers."

No professor of Arabic, of course, could stop Bunyan from preaching; but a county magistrate

unfortunately had that power. An assembly of these, at the Bedford Quarter Sessions of October 1660, had issued an order "for the publick reading of the Liturgy of the Church of England." About a month later, Bunyan was about to conduct a religious service at the little hamlet of Lower Samsell, 13 miles from Bedford, when a local constable stepped forward, and, speaking in the name of Mr Francis Wingate, of Harlington House, commanded him to desist. Bunyan had expected this interruption, and he was prepared for it. He had paced up and down among the elm-trees outside the meeting-house for an hour before the service, thinking the matter over. Was he to yield to the demands of secular authority, or was he to make a stand for Christ and His Church and the principle of religious liberty? There could be but one answer to this question. Should such a man as he flee—John Bunyan, an awakened preacher of Jesus Christ, set for the defence of the Gospel? If the leaders should faint and fail in this crisis, what would become of the rank and file? The Bunyan we meet with in these self-communings, and the deeds that followed them, is a new Bunyan, with the stuff of martyrs in him, a stalwart pioneer and champion of religious liberty. In the spirit of Martin Luther, whom he so much admired, he must learn to say: "Here stand I, God helping me. I can do no other." Bunyan was not in the ordinary sense a political dissenter or revolutionary, and he had too great a sense of humour ever to become a fanatic. All he wanted was freedom to preach the Gospel of Christ in his own way, and that he was resolved to have.

James Anthony Froude says truly of him that "no force could have subdued him into a decent Anglican divine." [1]

There is no need to give in detail the browbeatings that followed. These took the course that is normal in such cases. Mr Francis Wingate and Sir John Kelynge stormed and bullied; but John Bunyan was now the embodiment of the rising spirit of incensed England, and he would not budge. The result was that he was condemned to imprisonment in Bedford county jail, in the month of January 1660–1, for the offence of "devilishly and perniciously abstaining from coming to church to hear divine service, and for being a common upholder of several unlawful meetings and conventicles, to the great disturbance and distraction of the good subjects of this kingdom, contrary to the laws of our sovereign lord, the King." In vain the condemned man tried to reason with his accusers; in vain his despairing wife Elizabeth, whom Bunyan had recently married, threw a petition into the carriage of Sir Matthew Hale at the next following assizes; in vain she penetrated with her passionate appeal even to the chamber in the Swan Inn where two judges and numerous justices and county gentlemen were assembled. Bunyan was "had home" to prison, and there he was to remain, with brief intervals of liberty, for the next twelve years.

[1] *John Bunyan*, p. 176.

V

No man likes to be arbitrarily confined during the best period of his life; and when is manhood at its prime, if not between the ages of thirty-two and forty-three? Bunyan during these years was at the height of his powers. He had just, so to speak, found his life-work. The stormy days of spiritual conflict were over. His mind had now come to grasp with perfect clearness the main principles of the Gospel, as expounded to him by Mr Gifford. These principles, through the discovery within him of gifts hitherto unsuspected, he was beginning to unfold to an eagerly receptive public by voice and pen. Alluring visions of success and influence, both as a preacher and as a writer, seemed to be opening up before him in all directions. And then the doors of a jail were closed upon him, for twelve long years, and he became as one of them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.

It is true there was some mitigation of his hard lot. He could still preach, though to a very limited audience, and he could still write. His fellow-prisoners, of whom there were at times as many as sixty, provided the materials of a congregation; and we may be sure that Bunyan, like the apostle Paul before him, lost no opportunity of commending the Gospel to those who were associated with him in bonds. He would exhort the unbelieving, teach the ignorant, confute gainsayers, warn backsliders, reason with doubters, comfort the depressed.

From preaching, Bunyan would sometimes turn

to writing. He beguiled many a weary hour of his captivity by composing treatises on prayer, on the behaviour of a Christian living in the world, on the resurrection of the dead, and on the transcendent glories of the New Jerusalem. He also cultivated his taste for rhyming and wrote two compositions in the form of verse, one of them a dialogue between the soul and Satan, the other a practical epistle to a friend. These employments helped to pass the time and relieved the monotony of sitting on filthy straw all day and earning a meagre pittance by making tagged laces. But twelve years, of twelve months each, take a long time to pass!

It is natural for one who is shut off from intercourse with the world to turn his mind inward upon his own thoughts, as well as backward among the memories of the past. Bunyan indulged freely in both strains of reflection. What a career his had been, how abounding in tokens alike of mercy and of judgment! When he had been in prison for about five years, it occurred to Bunyan to write a book about these things, and to give the world an account of his own religious history. The result was *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, one of the most poignant and moving spiritual autobiographies ever written. He wrote this and published it in 1666. But still the weeks and months and years ran on, and the day of his release seemed never to come any nearer.

Like all prisoners, Bunyan would be intensely interested, not only in the thoughts and experiences of his own inner life, but also in all that was happening in the world around him. He would be kept

informed of the course of public affairs; but, alas, very little of it was calculated to reassure him. While he was languishing in the prison-house, the storm of persecution was beating ever more fiercely on his brethren without. Bunyan would learn in 1662 that, by a new Act of Parliament, strict uniformity of episcopal forms of worship was to be enforced throughout the land; in 1664, that a fine of £5, or three months' imprisonment, would be imposed on such as attended a meeting of more than five persons (in addition to members of a family) for any religious purpose not in conformity with the Church of England; and in 1665, that a law had been passed forbidding Nonconformist ministers, under a penalty of £40, to reside within five miles of any borough where they had formerly preached or taught. Bunyan's beloved comrades in Christ Jesus, left leaderless in 1662 by the death of their pastor, John Burton, were now being driven by the pelting of this pitiless storm of persecution to take refuge secretly in barns, haylofts, and ruined cellars, while he, in jail, was unable either to ward off their distresses or to share their hardships. And still the years dragged on.

Not less hard to bear was the anxiety that weighed on Bunyan's mind when he thought of the members of his own family. While Bunyan was in prison his eldest daughter Mary, a child whom he especially loved because of her blindness, passed from the age of ten to that of twenty-two. His second daughter, Elizabeth, from being a girl of six grew up to become a young woman of eighteen. There remained two boys, John and Thomas, of

still more tender years. It was little comfort that these might be permitted to speak to him occasionally through a grating, or even to visit him and bring him comforts. That was no compensation for their being denied his presence in the home at a time when they most needed him as bread-winner and father.

The anguish of spirit caused by these things may be imagined. Bunyan was an affectionate father, and he might have been restored to his wife and family if he had recanted his opinions. He was well accustomed to whisperings of the devil, urging him to sell Christ ; and in moments of gloom and depression, during those interminable years, promptings of worldly interest must often have assailed him with appeals well-nigh irresistible. "Why any longer continue to be martyred for an utterly hopeless cause ? Only conform, and enter at once into liberty and peace. Thou mayest be restored to thy friends and loved ones, and still write and testify of the grace of God toward thee, if only thou wilt refrain from unlawful preachings and the pernicious attempt to uphold schismatical conventicles." Such thoughts, we cannot doubt, sometimes insinuated themselves into John Bunyan's mind. But always they were expelled again. "The parting with my Wife and poor Children hath often been to me in this place as the pulling of the Flesh from my Bones ; and that not only because I am somewhat too fond of these great Mercies, but also because I should have often brought to my mind the many hardships, miseries, and wants that my poor Family was like to meet with should I be taken from them, *especially my*

poor blind child, who lay nearer my heart than all I had besides. O, the thoughts of the hardships I thought my Blind one might go under would break my heart to pieces. . . . Yet recalling myself, thought I, *I must venture* you all with God, though it goeth to the quick to leave you. O, I saw in this condition I was as a man who was pulling down his House upon the head of his Wife and Children; yet, thought I, I must do it, I must do it."

It cannot be said that the occasional relaxations of prison discipline, which permitted the condemned man, through the slackness of indulgent jailers, to visit his friends, and even to travel to London, would do much to relieve Bunyan of his anxieties. Rather, they would augment them, as when a convalescent who has been allowed to sit up for a little while is compelled by authority to go back to bed again. The only thing that really reconciled Bunyan to his prison sorrows was the opening they give him into the deeper significance of the Bible. "I never had in all my life so great an inlet into the Word of God as now. The Scriptures that I saw nothing in before are made in this place to shine upon me. Jesus Christ also was never more real and apparent to me than now. Here I have seen him and felt him indeed. . . . As being very tender of me, he hath not suffered me to be molested, but would with one Scripture and another strengthen me against all; insomuch that I have often said, were it lawful I could pray for greater trouble for the greater comfort's sake." These words strangely echo the jubilant exclamations of another saint of God, not unacquainted with the interiors of prisons.

"I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then am I strong."

VI

Bunyan spent a fifth of his life in prison. Three-quarters of that life lay behind him when he emerged, a free man, from Bedford jail in 1672, as the result of King Charles's Declaration of Indulgence. He was then aged forty-three, so that of his sixty years of life nearly seventeen remained. Bunyan made the most of them. All the stored energy that had been accumulating, all the carefully laid plans that had been maturing, during the long period of enforced confinement, were now put to use. Bunyan's first care was for the harassed flock of Christ of which he had been elected the pastor a couple of months before he was actually released from prison. This was no longer part of the State Church, worshipping in St John's, as it was in the days of John Gifford and John Burton. It was now a fellowship of "separated" Christians, permitted, by a licence granted in the month of May, to meet for worship in Josias Ruffhead's barn in Mill Lane. Bunyan devoted to the oversight of this flock all the time he could spare from his work as a brazier, to which he now returned for the maintenance of his family.[1]

[1] The word "tinker" ought to be excluded from a book on Bunyan. It is true that the term was applied to him, perhaps maliciously, in the official warrant for his arrest. But it then had, and still has, vagrant and disreputable associations quite out of keeping with Bunyan's character and calling. Both he and his father described themselves as braziers.

Under his care the church grew rapidly in numbers and attracted members from all parts of the county.

By the year 1676 there existed in Bedfordshire, largely through Bunyan's influence, a total Nonconformist community of between 3000 and 4000 persons, a proportion of one in twelve of the population for the whole county, whereas in the diocese of Lincoln at the same time the proportion was one in twenty-one. Nor were Bunyan's activities confined to his own immediate neighbourhood. In May, 1672, soon after his release from prison, he applied for licences for twenty-five other preachers besides himself, and thirty other buildings besides Josias Ruffhead's barn in Bedford. Eight of these were distributed throughout Northamptonshire, Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire, and Hertfordshire. Bunyan himself—"Bishop Bunyan" his people now affectionately called him—rode up and down the country with the message of the Gospel, and occasionally visited London, where as many as twelve hundred persons would assemble to hear him preach at seven o'clock in the morning of a working day in the winter-time, and where the crowds were sometimes so great that he "was fain at a back-door to be pulled almost over people to get upstairs to his pulpit."

Bunyan died, as he would have wished to do, in harness. Travelling to Reading on an errand of mercy, he there reconciled a father to his son, then hurried on through drenching rain-storms to London, where he fulfilled an engagement and preached with great fervour from John i. 13. He had barely time after that to correct the proofs of his latest book,

showing "the excellency of a broken heart, the nature, signs, and proper effects of a contrite spirit," when a violent fever seized him at the house of John Strudwick on Snow Hill. Here, a few days later, on the 31st of August, 1688, John Bunyan crossed the dark river of death and was admitted to the Celestial City of his dreams.

It being impossible that his bodily remains should be carried home to Bedford, these were buried in the quiet cemetery of Bunhill Fields, a place more dedicated than any other plot of English ground, save Westminster Abbey, to the memory of supreme imaginative genius. How hallowed is the resting-place that contains the sacred dust of John Bunyan, William Blake, George Fox, Daniel Defoe!

CHAPTER TWO

JOHN BUNYAN: WRESTLER WITH GOD

JOHN BUNYAN'S *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, written in prison when he was thirty-seven, is one of the great classics of the religious life. It has not the wide range of Augustine's passionate *Confessions*, or the calm, still depths of that cloistral book, *The Imitation of Christ*. It does not manifest the dreamy mysticism of the *Theologia Germanica* or the clear mental rigour of Law's *Serious Call*. Yet it is written with the heart's blood as much as any of these. George Fox and John Wesley, in their journals, enable us to see much of the conditions of contemporary England; but John Bunyan, in his book, has no time to look about him. He is oblivious of all else save the absorbing spiritual dialogue which is taking place between his own soul and God. Tossed to and fro on the raging currents of his tumultuous inner life, how can he give a thought to anything besides? Nowhere in the religious literature of the world is there a more throbbing, vivid, breathlessly written account of a soul in anguish and a soul in bliss.

Much of the interest of *Grace Abounding* lies in its anticipation of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Evangelist and Atheist, Mr Legality and Mr Worldly Wiseman, the Slough of Despond and the Wicket Gate, Hill

Difficulty, and the Palace Beautful, Giant Despair and the fiend Apollyon, are all recognisably present in the earlier treatise. Both books cover much the same ground, though in a different manner. What *Grace Abounding* gives us as raw material, in the form of autobiography, *The Pilgrim's Progress* reproduces as a work of art, and in a calmer mood, in the form of allegory.

It is interesting to note that while John Bunyan, in Bedford jail, was pouring his soul into *Grace Abounding*, John Milton, a blinded eagle, at Cripplegate and Chalfont St Giles, was soaring into the empyrean of his splendid imagination on the wings of the *Paradise Lost*. King Charles the Second, meanwhile, at Whitehall, busy with his pleasures, was not to be disturbed by thoughts of either of them.

I

Two things combined to make a spiritual conflict inevitable in the soul of Bunyan. One was his temperament, the other was his attitude to the Scriptures.

Bunyan was a wrestler by nature. He was the kind of man who, even if he had not "fightings without," was bound in the nature of things to have "fears within." His whole being vibrated to the appeal of supersensuous realities. He possessed an acutely aural and visual imagination, subject to hallucinations. Like Teresa and Joan of Arc, he heard voices; like Blake, he saw visions; like Swedenborg, he dreamed dreams. Jesus Christ

would look down from heaven upon him "through the tiles of the roof," frowningly. Satan, who was a far more real person to John Bunyan of Bedford than either Charles the Second or Justice Kelynge, would pluck at his clothes and tell him he had prayed enough. Bunyan could even detect the look of disappointment on Satan's features as he stole away leeringly, discomfited and defeated by his rival, Christ. Once, on Elstow Green, Bunyan distinctly heard a voice calling to him, "Wilt thou leave thy sins, and go to Heaven; or have thy sins, and go to Hell?" On another occasion he was so startled by someone apparently holloaing "Return to me," in tones loud enough to be heard half a mile away, that he actually looked over his shoulder to see who was calling.

These spiritual agitations profoundly affected the physical frame of Bunyan. He went about like a man bereft of life, and ready to swoon with fear. Sometimes his legs could scarcely carry him. "I was as if my loins were broken, or as if my hands and feet had been tied or bound in chains." Only by the supreme effort of forcibly clenching his jaws with his two hands could he prevent his lips from uttering fearful blasphemies. The caul of his heart, he tells us, was at times like to have been rent in twain, and he would feel "such a clogging of heat" at his stomach that he was "as if his breast-bone would have split asunder." Bunyan felt like a man who is at one and the same time consumed with fire and ground as it were to powder. "My very body would be put into action, or motion, by way of pushing or thrusting with my hands, or elbows;

still answering as fast as the destroyer said, *Sell him ; I will not, I will not, I will not, I will not ; no, not for thousands, thousands, thousands of Worlds.*"

With minute detail Bunyan tells us both when and where these tremors of the spirit seized him. A great part of the fascination of this book lies in the vivid pictures it provides of the outer as well as of the inner life of its author. Thus, it was under a hedge, we are told, about ten or eleven o'clock one day, that "suddenly this sentence bolted in on me : *The blood of Christ remits all guilt.*" Again, he informs us that he was utterly worn out from early morning "till seven or eight at night." As we read these burning pages, we come upon Bunyan picking up sticks or pins by the roadside or talking to crows on the ploughed fields. He is in stables, in barns, in milk-houses, closely engaged with God. He is seriously considering whether or no to bid the puddles on the road to become dry, as a test of his faith, but decides to go underneath a hedge and pray about it first. The book reveals him to us looking into a shop-window, sitting by the fire, moping in the fields, walking to and fro in a neighbour's house, and sunning himself on some wayside settle in an adjoining town. Bunyan permits us to see him lay down knife and fork and hastily rise from a half-finished meal, in order to pray to God. He even takes us to where he is lying in bed, beside his weeping wife, who is travailing with child.

But if Bunyan was impelled to spiritual conflict by a highly-strung imaginative temperament, he was no less driven to it by his conception of Holy Scripture. During this period, he tells us, he was

" never out of the Bible, either by reading or meditation." John Bunyan was familiar with the Book of Books from cover to cover. He was well acquainted with the top of Shenir and the hill Mizar. He knew all about Benhadad's servants going with ropes on their heads, and Nebuchadnezzar's being offered the kingdoms of this world. Nor was his interest that of a mere dilettante, attracted by historical or literary curiosity in his choice of reading. Bunyan opened his Bible as a condemned man, standing at the foot of the gallows, with the noose already flung around his neck, might open with trembling hands a missive from the king, containing a warrant for his execution or his reprieve. The Bible *was* a message from the King of Kings, and dealt with urgent matters of the soul's life or death. Bunyan could not, like the Quakers, trust the authority of the Inner Light. Neither could he, with the churchmen of his day, rely on the external guidance of an authoritative church. He had learned from John Gifford " to take special heed that we took not up any truth upon trust—as from this, or that, or any other man or men—but to cry mightily to God that he would convince us of the reality thereof, and set us down therein, by his own Spirit, in the holy Word." This authority sufficed for Bunyan. According to its own statement, the Bible could not lie, and " it was confirmed unto us by the blood of him that made it."

What tossed poor Bunyan to and fro, however, was the plain man's bewilderment regarding the *interpretation* of the Bible. In this respect *Grace Abounding* provides us with a curious blend of

allegory and literalism. Let us take two illustrative examples. Does the Book of Revelation inform us that in the midst of the throne and in the midst of the elders there stood a Lamb? Why then, that clearly points to the dual nature of the personality of our Lord. "In the midst of the Throne, thought I, there is his Godhead; in the midst of the Elders, there is his Manhood: But O! methought this did glister! it was a goodly touch and gave me sweet satisfaction." Similarly, when Christ in one of His parables uses the words: "Yet there is room," the sorely pressed tinker of Bedford must needs conclude that they were specially uttered with direct reference to himself. "Truly, I thought that by them I saw there was place enough in Heaven for me; and moreover, that when the Lord Jesus did speak these words, he then did think of me; and that he knowing that the time would come that I should be afflicted with fear that there was no place left for me in his bosom, did before speak this word, and leave it upon record, that I might find help there against this vile temptation . . . and the comfort was the more, when I thought that the Lord Jesus should think on me so long ago, and that he should speak them words on purpose for my sake."

Bunyan exercised more common sense in these matters than is sometimes supposed, or than he himself would readily have admitted. He was once horrified to discover that a text on which he had leaned for a whole year was not in Holy Scripture at all, but only in the Apocrypha! "This, at the first, did somewhat daunt me; but because by this

time I had got more experience of the love and kindness of God, it troubled me the less; especially when I considered, that though it was not in those texts that we call Holy and Canonical, yet forasmuch as this sentence was the sum and substance of many of the Promises, it was my duty to take the comfort of it."

II

An inevitable consequence of the two determining conditions above mentioned was an acute consciousness of sin. Being of the imaginative temperament we have described, and having in his hand the infallible Word of God, Bunyan was bound to feel a heavy burden of guilt upon his back. "How camest thou by the burden at first?" inquired Worldly Wiseman of Christian in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, and Christian replied: "By reading this Book in my hand." After all, this was Paul's experience too. "I had not known sin but for the law. For I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." Bunyan could not read the Bible without feeling stabbed by it.

Many would not have regarded Bunyan as a specially sinful man before he became conscious of this load of guilt. Although Robert Southey felt he could charge him with having been a "blackguard" in his youth, Bunyan was neither unchaste, nor a thief, nor a drunkard in his early days, and he accuses himself of nothing worse than "cursing, swearing, lying, and blaspheming the holy Name of God."

But that is not the point. Questions of relativity in guilt do not come in here. To the truly awakened conscience, degrees of sinfulness are as nothing, the fact of sin is everything. The occasion which arouses the consciousness of sin may appear to be trifling, a game of tip-cat, a peal of bells, an evening's dancing, a profane oath or two. But the jinn set free from that little bottle may swell in its proportions till it fills heaven and earth and blots out the sun. It is not at all surprising, therefore, that the man who as it were yesterday believed that "God could not but be as pleased with him as with any man in England," to-day comes to regard himself as a polluted reprobate, shut out for ever from God's mercies. Just so did Saul of Tarsus, the once self-righteous Pharisee, suddenly discover that he was the chief of sinners.

Note the effect of this consciousness of sin in Bunyan. He becomes a man who, whichever way he turns, is driven back upon himself and his doomed condition, like a scorpion ringed round with fire. Does he seek consolation in the realm of Nature? The sun in the sky becomes black with displeasure at his sin, and even the tiles upon the house-roofs bend themselves against him. How enviable the guilt-free animals are! Oh, to be a dog, or even a toad! Does he turn for help to religious books? Francis Spira only rubs salt into his already smarting wounds, and ominously suggests that "man knows the beginnings of sin, but who bounds the issues thereof?" Does he go trembling to "an ancient Christian" to learn whether or no he has committed the unpardonable sin? That Job's comforter is

convinced, after due reflection, that indeed he has. What a thought! "Is there but *one* sin amongst *so many* millions of sins, for which there is no forgiveness; and must I commit *this?* Oh, unhappy *sin!* Oh, unhappy *man!*"

For a time Bunyan tried to revel defiantly in his wickedness, and taste the sweetness of it. But no, that would not do. There was no real pleasure in the ways of ungodliness. Sin kept bubbling up within him as from a tainted fountain. The crisis came when he was tempted to sell Christ, and when, at the instigation of Satan, he did actually say: "Let him go if he will." Could anything be more awful? "Now was the battle won [*i.e.* lost], and down fell I, as a Bird that is shot from the top of a tree, into great guilt, and fearful despair." From that moment Bunyan felt that he was worse than the greatest sinners mentioned in Holy Writ. He was worse than David, than Solomon, than Manasseh. These had sinned only against the Law, but he had sinned point-blank against his Saviour. He was worse than Peter, worse even than Judas, and bore the mark of Cain. If only he could be as in months past, when the light of innocency still shined upon him. "Oh, that I had turned sooner! Oh, that I had turned seven years ago!"

But if to look backwards was fearful, to look forwards was more fearful still. Sin hath judgment. Even if a man might have all the kingdoms of this world, "one hour of hell-fire would make him forget them all." Bunyan tells us that "the Glory of the Holiness of God did break him to pieces." However much he might "wind and twine and

shrink under the burden that was upon him," he could not get away from its crushing load, or from " the tumultuous thoughts that did use, like masterless hell-hounds, to roar and bellow and make a hideous noise within me." The most agonising thing of all was that Christ Himself, from being a Lamb, had become as a Lion to him, and the most gracious words of Scripture were precisely those that wounded most piercingly him who had flouted the Holy One of God. While passing through this horror of great darkness, a veritable Valley of the Shadow of Death, Bunyan felt he would gladly have exchanged hearts with anybody. The pangs of hell got hold of him and he writhed in the bottomless pit. He was like the man in Scripture who sat among tombs, cutting himself with stones, or like that other character who " fell in the midst, and wallowed foaming." Bunyan would have given a thousand pounds, he tells us, to be able to shed a tear ; but he could not.

It is obvious that a man in this condition could find no foothold or handhold anywhere in the doctrine of justification by good works. With the thunders of Sinai crashing deafeningly about his ears, it became apparent that the fatuities of Mr Legality were but as empty words. Bunyan could now look back with shuddering awe to the time when he had walked briskly to church with his young wife on his arm, " going about to establish his own righteousness." " For, as I have well seen since, had I then died, my state had been most fearful."

III

Deliverance came from doctrines that were the mainstay of the three or four poor women whom Bunyan heard talking on the sunny doorstep in Bedford. These spoke of their miserable state by nature, and "did contemn, slight, and abhor their own righteousness, as filthy and insufficient to do them any good." Yet they had manifestly found their way to another kind of righteousness which caused them to overflow with joy. "They spake with such pleasantness of Scripture-language, and with such appearance of grace in all they said, that they were to me as if they had found a new world." This new world was none other than the world of Pauline theology which Bunyan had hitherto avoided and disliked. It was, indeed, the old familiar gospel of salvation through an atoning sacrifice, free grace, imputed righteousness, the new birth, and justification by faith alone. It proved, moreover, to be the gospel of "holy Mr Gifford," and of Martin Luther in his *Commentary on Galatians;* a gospel, too, that was exactly to fit the case of John Bunyan himself, for the simple reason that it offered, not an exhortation to effort and self-help, but the good news of redemptive deliverance from without to a soul bound hand and foot, gagged, helpless, and desperate because of sin. It was a gospel, in short, which offered to Bunyan's storm-tossed spirit immediate peace with God through Jesus Christ and the blood of His cross, and which proposed

forthwith to cover his filthy rags with the spotless, seamless robe of a Saviour's righteousness.

When these truths "spangled before his eyes," Bunyan could not but regard them as (so to speak) a life-buoy thrown to a drowning man. Only one agonising doubt remained. The sole passport to God's favour, it now appeared, was believing faith. Had Bunyan that faith, or had he not? Everything turned on that. What if, whatever he might do, he were not one of the elect after all? The terrible thing was that, as Mark explicitly tells us, Christ called to Him "whom He would." Did that "whom He would" include John Bunyan of Bedford, or did it exclude him? Bunyan *wanted* to be converted. He tells us he "flounced" towards the promises, as a horse strives to extricate itself from a miry bog. "Gold! Could it have been gotten for Gold, what could I have given for it! Had I a whole World, it had all gone ten thousand times over for this, that my Soul might have been in a converted state."

Fortunately, this sorely vexed spirit was to find peace at last in a final convulsive leap and clinging embrace of faith. His trust was now to repose, not on this or that agitated feeling, or even on this or that text of Scripture, but on Christ alone and His promised word. So this agonising swimmer, who had all but made the harbour a thousand times, but had ever and anon, by some treacherous cross-current, been swept out to sea again, found himself safely flung ashore at last, and desperately clutching the Rock of Ages. To adopt another metaphor, which has the merit of being Bunyan's own, the

worst of the thunderstorm was now over. Only the hinder part remained, a few lingering raindrops, some retreating detonations, a marvellously coloured arch shimmering in the heavens. "Now I could look from my self to Christ, and should reckon, that all those Graces of God that now were green on me, were yet but like those crackt-groats and four-pence half-pennies that rich men carry in their Purses, when their Gold is in their Trunks at home; O, I saw my Gold was in my Trunk at home! in Christ, my Lord and Saviour! Now Christ was all; all my Wisdom, all my Righteousness, all my Sanctification, all my Redemption."

IV

It seems almost a profanation to approach this record critically. What right have we to place a cool finger on this fevered pulse, and calmly take Bunyan's temperature, watch in hand? William James came to the conclusion that Bunyan was "a typical case of the psychopathic temperament, sensitive of conscience to a diseased degree, beset by doubts, fears, and insistent ideas, and a victim of verbal automatism both motor and sensory."[1] But Bunyan's experiences are not to be disposed of so summarily. No doubt there was a morbid element in his nature. Under a trained spiritual director, as has been suggested, he might have been steered more happily through the troubled waters that beset him. The Bible alone, in his untutored

[1] *Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 157.

hands, hardly provided a sufficient guide, for its teachings appeared inconsistent and contradictory. It spoke with two voices. If Bunyan received a "sweet glance" one moment from 2 Cor. v. 2, he would meet with a curt rebuff the next moment from Numb. xiv. 36, 37. "Yet there is room," "This sin is not unto death," "My grace is sufficient for thee," "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out," might be comforting and precious texts, a veritable shield in the day of battle. But still those other texts: "The Scripture cannot be broken," "Esau found no place of repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears," stood like a spear against him. Which was he to believe? The texts that "looked grimly at him" and "pinched him sore," or the texts that were "as a mill-post to his back"? The most encouraging texts, alas, closely resembled the sheet which appeared in Peter's dream, graciously let down from heaven and then snatched up again. No wonder Bunyan had a regular tug-of-war with Satan over "that blessed sixth of John." So much depended on which of them should have it in the end! At one point, it is true, he found that there were "only three or four" texts against him; but then, since any one of them sufficed to condemn him, what was he to do? So he was up and down twenty times in an hour, never knowing which way the scales would tip, or the oscillating see-saw rise.

All this is true. Yet there are some things to be said in answer to the charge that Bunyan was spiritually morbid and diseased, a sick soul, the victim of hallucination, an awful warning of the

consequences to be expected from Protestant independence and Puritan literalism of Scriptural interpretation.

In the first place, Bunyan's experience of the pangs of hell and the dreadfulness of sin are not peculiar to Protestant Evangelicalism. They may be paralleled in Catholicism, and in Judaism too; in *The Dream of Gerontius* and in the fifty-first psalm. Job, no less than Bunyan, was affrighted and scared by visions of the night, and there were moments when he chose "strangling and death" rather than life. Did not our own sane, masculine, robust Samuel Johnson quake with dread at the thought of confronting a holy God? When someone suggested to him, for his comfort, that perhaps he had forgotten the merits of his Redeemer, Johnson replied, in great perturbation of spirit: "I do not forget the merits of my Redeemer; but my Redeemer has said that He will set some on His right hand and some on His left." "He was in a gloomy agitation," adds Boswell, "and said: 'I'll have no more on't.'"

What Bunyan went through is substantially what Saul of Tarsus experienced, and it should never be forgotten that it was he who inspired both the title and the subject-matter of Bunyan's revealing book. Was Paul then morbid? The truth is that Bunyan belonged psychologically to the class of the twice-born, and his experiences would probably have been much the same under any theology. No director of souls has ever lived who could have saved him from Hill Difficulty or the Valley of Humiliation; and as for the Slough of Despond,

he himself has reminded us that every attempt to mend it has been in vain "for above this sixteen hundred years." "Yea, and to my Knowledge, said he, *Here* hath been swallowed up at least twenty thousand Cart-loads; yea, millions of wholesome Instructions, that have at all seasons been brought from all places of the King's Dominions . . . but it is the *Slough of Despond still;* and so will be, when they have done what they can."

Secondly, Bunyan by no means supposed that his own experiences should be regarded as a norm for all Christians. He did, indeed, put Christian through the worst of it; but he suffered Faithful and Hopeful and Christiana to pass through their pilgrimage and reach the Celestial City without being beset by terrifying dreams. Bunyan passed through a horror of great darkness, because he had to. But he himself tells us he was all the time "provoked to a vehement hunger and desire to be one of that number that did sit in the Sunshine." He did not *choose* to dwell among the tombs!

Finally, Bunyan came to see that his agonising experiences were well worth while. The Delectable Mountains more than made amends for the Valley of the Shadow of Death. The welcome of trumpeters and angelic hosts more than compensated for the awful conflict with the fiend Apollyon. Indeed, Bunyan could not have had the one without the other. The once-born may pursue "the even tenor of their way" in their journey Zionwards. They may experience a calm and equable progress from strength to strength, from glory to glory,

with never a hair stirred or a heart-beat quickened by the way. Perhaps they gain something by this imperturbability; but think what they also miss! Certainly Bunyan could never be of their company, nor could he find salvation on their terms. He must be one of those by whom the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, so that they take it by force. He sorrowfully, but unhesitatingly, turned away from the "ancient Christian" above spoken of, because he "found him, though a good man, a stranger to much combat with the Devil. Wherefore I went to God again, as well as I could, for mercy still."

To Bunyan there was no such peace as that which *followed* the devastating hurricane, no such blessed and tranquil haven as that which was reached *after* much buffeting with stormy seas. There must, he felt, be some experience of shuddering collapse and awe, if religion is to yield up its innermost secret of unimaginable bliss. In view of all this, Bunyan could even go so far as to say: "The guilt of sin did help me much; for still, as that would come upon me, the blood of Christ did take it off again, and again, and again, and that too, sweetly, according to the Scriptures."

Bunyan, in his own preface to the book, has described *Grace Abounding* as "a drop of honey that I have taken out of the carcase of a lion. I have eaten thereof myself also, and am much refreshed thereby. . . . I can remember my fears, and doubts, and sad months with comfort; they are as the head of Goliah in my hand." We too may thankfully share in such a triumph. What meant

anguish and loss to him, Bunyan has distilled into sweetness and profit for ourselves.

> Witness my name, if anagram'd to thee,
> The letters make, *Nu hony in a B.*
>
> JOHN BUNYAN.

CHAPTER THREE

JOHN BUNYAN: PASTOR AND PREACHER

I

If it were possible for us to triumph over the limitations of space and time, and to transport ourselves at will to the seventeenth century, and to the town of Bedford, what moment should we choose in which to introduce ourselves into the presence of John Bunyan? When should we most wish actually to come upon him in his manner as he lived?

Many would doubtless select some scene, some attitude, in which he has become famous. They would like to see him confronting Mr Francis Wingate at Harlington House,[1] or bending over the manuscript of *The Pilgrim's Progress* in Bedford jail. Yet neither of these sights would give us the essential, the characteristic Bunyan. He was something more than a passive resister, more even than an inspired author. In his own eyes, we may be sure, the most glorious moment of his life was reached when he became a Christian pastor. This event took place in 1672, when he received an invitation to shepherd the flock of God in Bedford which John Gifford had first gathered together

[1] See p. 25.

twenty-two years before. The record in the church minutes is as follows :

> At a full Assembly of the Church at Bedford the 21st of the 10th moneth [Jan. 21st, 1672] : After much seeking God by prayer, and sober conference formerly had, the Congregation did at this meeting with joynt consent (signifyed by solemne lifting up of their hands) call forth and appoint our brother John Bunyan to the pastorall office or eldership. And he accepting thereof, gave up himself to serve Christ and his Church in that charge ; and received of the Elders the right hand of fellowship.

Let us now exercise our imagination a little, and try to picture the scene that might be witnessed at a typical meeting of this Bedford church. The records of its activities have been preserved, and abundant extracts from them are given in Dr John Brown's indispensable biography. We are in a dimly-lighted room, and some fifty or sixty, perhaps a hundred, men and women of the humbler class are gathered together. In the chair sits a tall, strong-looking man, with a ruddy face, sparkling eyes, reddish hair turning to grey, and a gravely sedate countenance that " was convincing to the beholders and did strike something of awe into them that had nothing of the fear of God." Round him are a group of the elders or deacons of the church, Oliver Scott, Luke Astwood, Nehemiah Coxe, and some others.

The folk assembled are known to the world at large as Independents, upholders of the doctrines for which Henry Barrowe suffered martyrdom in 1593 and the Pilgrim Fathers left England on board

The Mayflower in 1620. They believe, that is to say, that a true church of Jesus Christ should as far as possible consist of Christians. It should be in some real sense the Body of Christ, a household of faith, the temple of God in the Spirit, a voluntary society of those who have been called, redeemed, sanctified by the grace of Christ, and who openly profess His name and seek to follow in His steps. As the record of the church admirably expresses it:

> The principle upon which they thus entered into fellowship one with another, and upon which they did afterwards receive those that were added to their body and fellowship, was *ffaith in Christ and Holiness of life*, without respect to this or that circumstance or opinion in outward and circumstantiall things. By which meanes grace and faith was incouraged, Love and Amity maintained, disputings and occasion to janglings and unprofitable questions avoyded, and many that were weake in the faith confirmed in the blessing of eternall life.

The organisation of such a society, it is held, must express its vital principle. It must be a self-governing body registering the mind of Christ, who is spiritually present in the midst wherever two or three are gathered together in His name. In their decisions, no pope, prelate, or priest, no earthly magnate or state official, must interfere, so far as matters of conscience are concerned. When engaged in the choice of its official leaders, as well as in the election and discipline of its own members, such a society must be autonomous, and must jealously guard both its own liberties and the "crown rights" of its Redeemer. The pastor of such

a church receives his sole and sufficient authorisation from the call of Christ, expressed through the community to which he ministers, and from the manifest fruits of the Spirit that attend his labours.

The members of the Church at Bedford being thus duly assembled, their first concern is to realise the solemn presence of God and of Jesus Christ through praise and prayer. Then comes perhaps the business of proposing additions to membership, and of hearing the reports of those who have been appointed to interview new candidates. After some discussion, Sister Heath and Sister Halle, of Clophill, are admitted to the fellowship of the church, but John Spencer is " desired to waite a while longer." As for John Overhand, his application is considered, but in view of the fact that " upon several accounts his life of profession hath not bin accompanyed with that holyness as becomes the gospel, it is concluded on the negative."

But the Church of Jesus Christ has power to loose as well as to bind. If a member may be admitted, he may also be cut off, and it is sometimes the unpleasant duty of the society to exercise discipline in this respect and to rebuke, perhaps to dismiss, backsliders. At the meeting we are supposed to attend there are several painful cases on the agenda. (We take the liberty of crowding into one evening what of course would be distributed over many months.) John Bunyan has to report with sorrow that Richard Deane has for some time been " withdrawing himself from the assemblyes of the saints," besides " selling deceitful goods to the great scandal of our profession " ; that George Skelton has been

guilty of " inhumane carriages towards his wife and children " ; that Robert Nelson " hath so trampled upon our holy order and fellowship that for the space of eight or nine years he could not be gotten to be present at any of our Church Assemblyes " ; that Sister Landay has been " countenancing Card-playing and deceiving the Church with her former seeming repentance " ; that Sister Elizabeth Maxey has been admonished " for calling her father lier, and for wicked carriages to her mother " ; and that, most grievous to relate, John Lush of Bedford has been " drunke after a very beastly and filthy manner, that is above the ordinary rate of drunkerds, for he could not be carried home from the Swan to his own house without the help of no less than three persons, who when they brought him home, could not present him as one alive to his familie he was so dead drunke."

Bunyan and his fellow-members agree that such flagrant delinquencies must be severely dealt with, " as becometh a people that keep faithful in the Lord." The meeting therefore decides that the defaulting brethren and sisters shall be visited and admonished. Brother Samuel Fenne and brother John Croker are deputed to plead with Richard Deane, and brother Bunyan and brother Harrington are asked to do their best to reclaim the wayward and unruly Humphrey Merrill. We can well imagine with what secret misgivings and heavy sinkings of heart, next evening, Bunyan will find himself on the doorstep of this erring brother.

How are such visitors received ? Subsequent entries in the minute-book inform us. It appears

that unrepentant backsliders, getting wind of the approach of a monitory deputation, sometimes contrive to be absent from home when it arrives. "Brother John Fenne certifyed to the Church that he and brother Bunyan had indeavoured to speak with Richard Deane, but (he continually indeavouring to avoide their delivering their message by keeping out of the way) they could by no means accomplish it, whereupon the Church did agree shortly to proceed further with him." What this means we may gather from an entry of a year later, which reads: "Brother Whiteman and brother Neh. Coxe were appointed to declare to Richard Deane the just and fearful sentence that in the name and power of the Lord Jesus had been denounced against him. As for Robert Nelson, it is to be considered which way notice may be given him thereof also, because for the present he cannot be spoken with."

Sometimes the backslider is "unfeignedly repentant and sorry" for what he has done. He promises in the strength of Christ "to indeavour reformation for time to come," and desires the prayers and patience of the church to that end. Humphrey Merrill, on the other hand, is in no mood to be admonished, but carries matters with a high hand and goes so far as to bring counter-charges against the church itself. He alleges "that they had their hands in the blood of the King; that they were disobedient to government, and that they were not a Church; together with severall other false and heinous accusations." On one memorable occasion a certain John Wildman "did desperately

charge our brother and pastor, John Bunyan, with calling the sisters to know their Husbands estates, in order to put a levy opon them wher In he was proued before the whole congregation an abominable lyer and slanderer of our beloved brother Bunyan; ffor those causes with others the congregation did at that meeting in Christ with draw church comunyan from him with joynt consent, not one so much as makeing the least sticke at it."

Is the reader repelled rather than attracted by these piquant and naïve revelations? Does he feel inclined to smile, perhaps to sniff, at such palpitating records of human weakness? Doubtless the form of church government known as Independency laid itself open to certain special kinds of abuse. In the hands of narrow-minded zealots, prying scandal-mongers, or over-scrupulous busybodies, it was apt to become an instrument of espionage and tyranny. One wonders, in reading those old records, whether the persons thus brought to the bar of human judgment were not sometimes rather harshly and censoriously dealt with. May not Sister Landay, for example, who "taught her children to play cards and remained impenitent after several admonitions," have had something to say for herself? Would she be dismissed from membership, or even admonished, by any church tribunal at the present day? The congregational conception of church government and discipline may be an ideal one, but it surely requires unusual spirituality of mind and largeness of heart in those who administer it, if the decisions registered are indeed to be the authentic voice of the Holy Ghost.

That such spirituality was by no means lacking in the Bedford church may be seen from some of the other items in the minute-book, to which we now return. Frequent mention is made of visits paid to members who are ill; and one entry records that "our sister Warner being in affliction by the losse of her husband and streights also as to her outward state, we desire brother John Fenne and brother Harrington to go visit her and give an account to the Church of her condition." In 1672, we read, a special meeting of the church was appointed "for prayer for our children and relations." The persecution of Nonconformists as early as 1657 was evidently a matter of deep concern to the brethren, and a date was set apart in that year "to seeke God about ye Church affaires and the affaires of the Nation, and for our bro: Whitbread, who hath long been ill: and also for counsaile what to doe with respect to the indictment against bro: Bunyan at ye Assizes for preaching at Eaton." On the eve of the Restoration, 29th January, 1660, the members "set apart the 5th day of the next weeke to seeke the Lord especially upon account of the distraction of the nation."

Occasionally a deeper note is sounded. At a meeting held in September, 1679, "it was proposed to the Church that care might be taken to consider of ways and means how we might Joyntly reforme and performe our dutyes one unto another According to what our relation in the fellowship of the Gospel calls for." Again, two months later, "the Church did solemnly give themselves up to the Lord and one with another, and did promise in

the strength of Christ to walke more in love one with another, and to performe the dutyes of their relation more carefully than formerlie they had done."

Some of the tenderest records of the church are contained in letters addressed by the pastor to poor and afflicted members. The following, from a letter directed to "our beloved Sister Katherine Hustwhat," is in Bunyan's best vein: "Sister, thy keeping lowe and being emptied from vessell to vessell, is that thou mightest be kept sweet and more cleane in thy soul than thou wouldest or couldest otherwise be. The first wayes of David were his best, and yet those wayes were most accompanyed with affliction. They that are naked and lodge without clothing, that have no covering in the cold, and that are wet with the showers of the mountanes, these imbrace the Rock for want of shelter. . . . Christ suffereth us to hunger and to wander in a bewildered condition, that we may tast and relish the words of God, and not live by bread alone."

Surely we have here a living embodiment of that beautiful portrait of the ideal pastor which hung in the Interpreter's House in *The Pilgrim's Progress*: "It had Eyes lifted up to Heaven, the best of Books in his hand, the Law of Truth was written upon his Lips, the World was behind his Back; it stood as if it pleaded with Men, and a Crown of Gold did hang over its Head."

It is perhaps not fair to judge the church at Bedford, over which Bunyan presided, by the scanty and somewhat misleading records from which we have just quoted. No one would claim that this is the *only* rightful type of a Christian community; but it

is surely closely modelled on the primitive organisations of the New Testament, and a place at least must be found for it in any truly catholic and finally comprehensive church. Bunyan's own conception of church fellowship, after all, is to be found, not in the imperfect register of his Bedford fellow-Christians, but in the picture he has given us, in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, of the grave, sweet discourse, the loving solicitude, the tenderly affectionate inquiries of Prudence, Piety, and Charity, in the House Beautiful. Theirs was evidently the kind of welcome which Bunyan thought *should* be extended to candidates for membership in the Church of Christ.

> *Prud.* Do you find sometimes, as if those things were vanquished, which at other times are your perplexity?
>
> *Chr.* Yes, but that is but seldom; but they are to me golden hours, in which such things happen to me.
>
> *Prud.* Can you remember by what means you find your annoyances at times, as if they were vanquished?
>
> *Chr.* Yes, when I think what I saw at the Cross, that will do it; and when I look upon my Broidered Coat, that will do it; and when I look into the Roll that I carry in my Bosom, that will do it; and when my thoughts wax warm about whither I am going, that will do it.

Happy, surely, was the church that had for its pastor a man who could write such words as these.

II

Let us now turn from the private meetings of the church to a public service, at which crowds of people have assembled in order to hear the converted

brazier preach. Bunyan modestly finds his way to the pulpit and conducts the whole service himself. He reads and perhaps expounds the Scripture, then prays in his own language as God inspires him. Bunyan has little sympathy with those who are "so well skilled as that they have both the matter and manner of their prayers at their finger-ends; setting such a prayer for such a day, and that twenty years before it comes; one for Christmas, another for Easter, and six days after that." He believes that "a good sense of sin and the wrath of God, and some encouragement from God to come unto Him, is a better common prayer book than that which is taken out of the papistical mass-book, being the scraps and fragments of the devices of some popes, some friars, and I know not what."

Finally comes the sermon, and it may perhaps help us to realise what a discourse of John Bunyan's was like if we analyse briefly the last sermon he ever preached.[1] It was based on the words of John i. 13: "Which are born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

After a brief exegetical exordium, Bunyan proceeds to a doctrinal exposition of the text. "First I will show you what we mean by blood." No merely physical or racial generation secures our admission to the kingdom of heaven. Neither is that to be obtained by the will of the flesh, the desires and inclinations, however vehement, of ordinary unregenerate human nature. "Though a man without grace may have a will to be saved, yet he cannot

[1] Full notes were taken and afterwards published.

have that will God's way." No, the effectual receiving of Christ through faith is the result of a new spiritual birth, and of that only.

There follows a series of similitudes designed to unfold what this spiritual birth implies. Just as a new-born child emerges from the darkness of the womb, so the child of God must be translated from the dungeon of sin and evil into the realm of light and grace. Next, the first sign of life in an infant is that it cries. "You that are born of God, and Christians, if you be not criers, there is no spiritual life in you." Further, a healthy baby will crave the breast, cannot indeed continue to live without it; so the newly-born in Christ Jesus "desire the sincere milk of the Word, that they may grow thereby." Then come the swaddling-clothes, to keep the infant warm. "When women are with child, what fine things will they prepare for their child! Oh, what fine things, what wrappings of gold, has Christ prepared for all that are born again!" Moreover, even as a child resembles its own father, so every one that is born of God "hath something of the features of heaven upon him." Finally, a child grows up in the custom of his father's house, as a Christian should do within the fellowship of the Church; and he goes to his father for what he wants, it may be bread or a pair of shoes, as the Christian should do in the exercise of prayer.

The sermon closes with an urgent, practical application and appeal. Are you born of God, or no? Are you brought into the light out of the dark dungeon of this world? "All God's children are criers; cannot you be quiet without you have a

bellyful of the milk of God's Word ? " No child of God, no inheritance. If you are the children of God, live together lovingly. If the world quarrel with you, it is no matter ; but it is sad if you quarrel together. " Dost thou see a soul that has the image of God in him ? Love him, love him ; say, This man and I must go to heaven one day. Serve one another, do good for one another ; and if any wrong you, pray to God to right you, and love the brotherhood."

A sermon built on these lines may not be quite in accordance with the fashion of the present day, but it does not differ greatly from one that John Wesley or C. H. Spurgeon might have preached. All Bunyan's sermons give one the impression of being admirably adapted to the end they had in view, namely, the wounding of sinners and the comforting of saints. Bunyan was what used to be called a " painful " preacher. He meant to hurt and to stab and to prick men's consciences. The matters of which he was trustee, as an ambassador of Christ, were of tremendous urgency and importance ; we could not, dared not, neglect them with impunity. Charles Doe says of Bunyan that he was " a great convert," and we can well believe it. Here is a typical passage :

> Covet a broken heart, prize a contrite spirit ; I say, covet it now, now the white flag is hung out, now the golden sceptre of grace is held forth to you. It is wounding work, of course, this breaking of hearts, but without wounding there is no saving. . . . Men are too lofty, too proud, too wild, too devilishly resolved in the ways of their own destruction. Nothing will hinder them from

ruining their own precious and immortal souls but the breaking of their hearts.

But if Bunyan could wound, he could also heal. None loved better than he to pour in oil and wine. His acquaintance with his own heart made him exceedingly tender and sympathetic towards all troubled spirits. One who knew him well has thus written of him: "He was the first man that ever I heard preach to my unenlightened understanding and experience, for methought all his sermons were adapted to my condition, and had apt similitudes, being full of the love of God and the manner of its secret working upon the soul, and of the soul under the sense of it, that I could weep for joy most part of his sermons; and so, by a letter, I introduced myself into his acquaintance and, indeed, I have not since met with a man I liked so well."

The responsibility of preaching involved for Bunyan real anguish of the spirit. Sometimes the devil would whisper thoughts of blasphemy into his ear, or tempt him to swellings of pride and upliftings of the heart, even as he entered the pulpit. Sometimes, on the other hand, he felt "as if an Angel were at his back." He preached what he "smartingly did feel," and himself assures us that "in my preaching I have really been in pain; I have, as it were, travailed to bring forth children to God." "I went myself in chains to preach to them in chains; and carried that fire in my own bosom that I persuaded them to beware of."

But if Bunyan knew what it was to plunge into the depths, there were times when he was caught up rapturously to the heights. It is scarce possible

to read the following words without calling up in imagination the tremulous voice, the earnestly pleading tones, the radiant spiritual expression, of him who spoke them.

> O thou Son of the Blessed, what grace was manifest in thy condescension! Grace brought thee down from heaven, grace stripped thee of thy glory, grace made thee poor and despicable, grace made thee bear such burdens of sin, such burdens of sorrow, such burdens of God's curse as are unspeakable. O Son of God! grace was in all thy tears, grace came forth with every word of thy sweet mouth. Grace came out where the whip smote thee, where the thorns pricked thee, where the nails and spear pierced thee. O blessed Son of God! Here is grace indeed! Unsearchable riches of grace! Unthought-of riches of grace! Grace to make angels wonder, grace to make sinners happy, grace to astonish devils. And what will become of them that trample under foot this Son of God?

CHAPTER FOUR

JOHN BUNYAN : DREAMER OF DREAMS

I

THE spirit of man has seldom triumphed more gloriously over hampering material conditions than when John Bunyan wrote *The Pilgrim's Progress* in Bedford jail. This was not the county jail, at the corner of Silver Street and High Street, with which he became so well acquainted between 1660 and 1672 ; but the town jail, in which he was imprisoned for about six months during a later persecution in 1676. The town jail of Bedford was then situated in the upper part of a turreted gateway, which guarded the north end of the central arch of the bridge over the river Ouse, the corresponding gateway at the other end being used as a military storehouse. Here, in an apartment measuring about fourteen feet square, Bunyan dreamed his immortal dream and gave to the world one of the greatest masterpieces of imaginative literature. Beneath him was the din of this world's traffic, the murmur of pedestrians, the clattering of horses' hoofs, the rumbling of carts and waggons, the swishing of water against stone piers, as the Ouse crept slowly eastward towards the Fens. But Bunyan, if he heard these things, heeded them not. His thoughts

were with Christian on the Delectable Mountains, or in the Land of Beulah, or in that soul-refreshing meadow that was " curiously beautified with lilies and green all the year long."

John Bunyan was by temperament a dreamer. He closely resembled another visionary, one Joseph, to whom the whole universe was excitingly alive, so that the sheaves of the field did obeisance one to another, and the far-off moon and stars signalled their messages to discerning mortals. Such persons are poets. They live, like William Blake, in two worlds, between which there exist innumerable glancing parallelisms and correspondences. The seen suggests the unseen, the temporal the eternal, and every material fact proclaims itself a symbol of something spiritual. Bunyan's mind had this darting, penetrating quality. He beheld truth, not in the form of abstract propositions, but in vivid metaphor and in concrete pictures of imaginative realism. Thus, it was natural for him, in moments of aspiration, to think of himself as struggling through some dark and narrow passage, in a supreme effort to reach the pleasant beams of the sun on the side of a high hill; in moments of apprehension, to imagine himself smothered within the folds of a gipsy's cloak; in moments of supreme ecstasy, to see the seals of his redemption dangling in heaven before his eyes.

To such a nature the Bible was treasure-trove. It exactly fitted Bunyan's peculiar genius, so that he absorbed its teaching as eagerly and instinctively as a wick sucks up the oil in which it is immersed. It is sometimes complained that Bunyan was a man

of one book. He needed no other. Between the covers of the Old and New Testaments he found everything that his soul could possibly desire. The Semitic mind, like his own, was concretely imaginative. It thought in pictures and metaphors and symbols. It knew, for example, that trees can clap their hands and that even the mighty mountains may skip like rams. The Hellenic genius blossomed out naturally in logic and speculation and the plastic arts; but the Hebrew genius, which was denied these avenues of self-expression, turned instead to the imagery of religious poetry. It loved to dwell, in clear prophetic vision, on a Golden Age, when the desert should rejoice and blossom as the rose; when swords should become ploughshares and spears pruning-hooks; when the wolf should dwell with the lamb and the leopard lie down with the kid, and a little child should play on the basilisk's den.

These characteristics of the Hebrew people attained to perfect expression in their greatest representative, the Son of David. Jesus of Nazareth, besides being much else, was the supreme allegorist of human history. Spiritual truth lurked everywhere around Him in the homeliest and most familiar guise. It was impossible for Him to watch the hen gathering her chickens under her wings, or to notice the sower casting seed into the ground, or the fisherman hauling in his nets, without discerning a deeper significance in all these things. To the seeing eye and the understanding heart they were eloquent of a truth beyond themselves. It is not too much to say that no one has ever entered into this aspect of the mind of Christ more fully than

John Bunyan. To him also it came as a kind of second nature to speak the truth in parables. If Jesus, drawing upon His observation of many a homely scene witnessed in Nazareth, saw divine truth in the search for a lost coin or the mingling of leaven with a bowlful of meal, Bunyan no less used his knowledge of the ways of working folk in Elstow to set forth the spiritual significance of water-sprinkling as a means of laying the dust in a room that has just been swept.

II

Being so constituted, then, and having the Bible in his hand, it is not surprising that Bunyan, with the prospect of six months' solitary confinement to look forward to, turned his thoughts to the writing of a comprehensive allegory of the Christian life. The Word of God itself, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, contained a reminder that we are pilgrims and strangers on this earth, having no continuing city but seeking one to come. Why not elaborate this metaphor and make a story of it? Surely a faithful narrative of the fortunes of the human soul in its pilgrimage to heaven would be the most fascinating ever penned. Such a seed of thought, once it had germinated in Bunyan's mind, would quickly send roots downwards and bear fruit upwards. The whole of his previous experience would miraculously lend itself to the design. Fertile suggestions and ideas would positively clamour for inclusion in his scheme, as he himself tells us they did. The country, for example, through which the imaginary

traveller would have to pass, would readily be mapped out. There would have to be a Hill Difficulty in that territory, and a By-path Meadow; a Valley of Humiliation and a Slough of Despond; a Palace Beautiful and a Doubting Castle; a Vanity Fair and a Land of Beulah. And how much besides!

Next, the characters to be included would come crowding round Bunyan in his little room over the river Ouse. How numerous they were, these ghostly visitors, and how well Bunyan knew them all! It is impossible in these pages to deal with even a tenth part of the varied personages who pass before us in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, but something may be said of the outstanding groups into which they fall.

Bunyan, it is evident, greatly admired the sturdy and valiant type of character. He liked a man of action, one who was eager to go forth to battle, with no armour on his back, but "a right Jerusalem blade" in his hand, ready to give and to receive shrewd blows in an unequal conflict. When "a man of very stout countenance" showed himself determined to fight his way past an armed guard of warders into the palace shown in the Interpreter's House, "cutting and hacking most fiercely," we are significantly told that Christian smiled[1] and said,

[1] The other occasions on which Christian "smiled" in *The Pilgrim's Progress* are worth noting. We are told that after his victory over Apollyon he "did smile and look upward! but it was the dreadfullest sight that ever I saw." Again, Christian "modestly smiled" when amused by the brave pratings of Mr Talkative. In the Second Part, at the Interpreter's House, "one smiled, and another smiled, and they all smiled for joy that Christiana was become a Pilgrim." A little later Old Honest "skipped and smiled and blessed the women and children with a thousand good wishes." The Puritans, it is clear, were not so morose as some critics would make out!

" I think verily I know the meaning of this." Even the remembrance of this valorous deed, a little later, " did ravish " the Pilgrim's heart. Christian himself belonged to this brave company of stalwarts. So did Faithful and Great-heart and Mr Stand-fast and Old Honest and Mr Valiant-for-truth.

Again, Bunyan had a great fondness for those of his characters who were not so much fighting their own battles as solicitously caring for the souls of others. Here the pastoral concern that was in him found imaginative expression. Abundant honour is conferred upon Evangelist in the earlier part of the book and on Gaius and Mr Mnason in the later. To the same class belong the Interpreter, who instructs Christian in the way of life; the Shining Ones, who give him a roll, a seal, a salutation, and a change of raiment; the handmaids Discretion, Prudence, Piety, and Charity, who so graciously minister to him in the Palace Beautiful; and the group of shepherds who " look very lovingly " upon him on his arrival at the Delectable Mountains. These characters are portrayed with deep sympathy and insight. So ardently do they love pilgrims that in some cases " the water stands in their eyes " [1] for very tenderness.

It is in keeping with this that Bunyan should overflow with compassionate affection for the more timid and shrinking characters and those inclined to melancholy. He knew these well from his intercourse with members of the church at Bedford.

[1] This was a favourite phrase of Bunyan's. He used it four times in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, to describe Discretion, Hopeful, Christiana and her family (in the Interpreter's House), and Mr Fearing.

There he must have become acquainted with many self-disparaging, self-tormenting souls, who would fain embark on the Christian life but that they are afraid to venture. For all such Bunyan felt the sympathy of a stronger, more experienced, elder brother, and also (no doubt) the fellow-feeling of a companion in distress who had often himself trembled lest he should become a castaway. He has described this type for us in Timorous and Mistrust, who shake with fright when they behold the lions guarding the Interpreter's House; in Mr Feeble-mind, who has arrived at the heroical resolution that he will go when he cannot run, and creep when he cannot go; in Mr Ready-to-halt, with his serviceable crutches; in Mr Dispondency and his sister Much-afraid; and especially in his masterly portrait of Mr Fearing, who trembles all through his pilgrimage at the thought of the chill waters of the River of Death, and the hobgoblins that will have him there, but who finds, to his surprise, that the River is calmer and shallower at his crossing than ever it had been before.

But if Bunyan could be sympathetic towards such as these, he could be equally stern towards types of character which he condemned. Formalist and Hypocrisy; Simple, Sloth, and Presumption; Old Adam, Wanton, and Madam Bubble, receive no mercy at his hands. The same may be said of Lord Hate-good and his obsequious subordinates in Vanity Fair, not to mention Atheist, Mr Lechery, Mr Hold-the-world, Mr Save-all, Mr Money-love, and a host of others. Sorrowfully, yet firmly, Bunyan exposes the inner gangrene of corruption that characterises

these. Nothing apparently can be done for them. They must go to their own place. If they perish, at least they have been faithfully dealt with, and the guilt of their blood rests not on the head of those who warned them. Bunyan's curt dismissal of such persons from his narrative is sometimes very terrible. "Thus much concerning Pliable."

Not the least interesting of Bunyan's characters are those whom he feels he can treat in the vein of irony and humour. These are usually men who have no great vice in them, but who are ignorant and self-deceived. They are such as imagine that it is quite possible to reach the Celestial City without the need of strenuous exertion, or the trouble of starting the journey at the wicket-gate. What does it matter how one comes to find oneself in the pilgrim way, so long as one is jogging along comfortably with other wayfarers? "If you're in, you're in." Are we not all good fellows, and cheerfully bound to the same destination?

Bunyan had often argued with such self-styled Christians, in the hope of convincing them of their utter lack of either justifying faith or sanctifying grace. But he seems to have made little impression on their minds. It only remained to hold them good-humouredly up to ridicule. Thus, Mr Talkative is a brave fellow, who has much to say for himself, and who can use the language of Canaan in a way calculated to deceive even the elect. But he proves to be "something more comely at a distance than at hand," and he cannot survive the close scrutiny of searching questions about the new birth. Similarly, Ignorance has a mind "full of

good motions" and other whimsies, but he jangles with words, as other unawakened sinners do, and "speaks reproachfully of what he knows not." Of the same company is Mr Brisk, the smart young wooer whose countenance falls when he finds Mercy, by diligence in good works, laying up in store a good foundation against the time to come, and who finally sheers off, concluding that Mercy is "a pretty lass, but troubled with ill conditions."

Finest of all the characters thus ironically depicted is Mr By-ends. With charming insouciance he unblushingly avows his own emptiness and futility. His great grandfather was a waterman, "looking one way and rowing another"; and he himself got most of his estate by the same occupation. His two guiding principles are, never to strive against wind and tide, and always to be most zealous for religion when it goes in silver slippers. By-ends, of course, he carefully explains, was not his real name, but only a nickname given by some who could not abide him; and it was a matter of extraordinary and quite unexpected *luck* that his judgment always happened to "jump with the present way of the times, whatever it was, and my chance was to get thereby."

In such passages (and they are numerous throughout the book) Bunyan reveals himself as one of our finest masters of typically English humour. By-ends is a character that Shakespeare himself might not have been ashamed of. Bunyan's sly humour peeps out once more in the delight with which he concocts pills for the purging of dyspeptic children *Ex Carne et Sanguine Christi*, quaintly adding in the margin:

"The Lattine I borrow." Indeed, it is difficult to exhaust the drolleries of this episode. When Christiana, in her distress, calls for any remedy that will cure her son, yet delicately hints at the costliness of physicians' charges, Dr Skill, with delicious evasiveness, professionally replies: "Nay, I hope I shall be reasonable."

All these characters are intensely alive, and all are different. Christian is easily distinguishable from Faithful, and Faithful from Hopeful, though all three belong to the same general type. Even Mr Fearing is by no means a reproduction of his uncle, Mr Feeble-mind, though their temperaments are so much alike. "He was a little shorter than I, but we were much of a complexion." The persons introduced into the narrative may be prominent or obscure, they may be sympathised with or they may be condemned, but Bunyan never fails to describe them with ease, energy, and skill.

III

When we consider the range and variety of the characters thus portrayed, and the marvellous delicacy and insight of their portrayal, we are perhaps amazed that all this should come within the scope of one whose field of observation was confined to Bedford and the adjoining neighbourhood. The feat suggests a comparison with Robert Burns, who became equally well versed in the secrets of the human heart, though his survey was confined

to a few villages in Ayrshire. The truth is that a deeply searching penetration into the mysteries of human nature does not require an extensive knowledge of mankind. All the material which a man of genius needs is likely to be found in his own immediate neighbourhood.

Robert Burns and John Bunyan were in many respects alike. Both were men of the people and wrote the common speech with genius. The one a ploughman, the other a brazier, both sprang from humble obscurity to world-wide fame. Both took an essentially poetical view of life, though in the case of one of them the verse is negligible. Both combined a spirit of overflowing tenderness with the stout and manly temper that defies oppression. In both, a soaring and resplendent imagination chose to express itself in forms of concrete realism. Both may be described as kindly satirists, who excelled in the richly humorous exposure of religious shams. Is not Holy Willie own brother to Mr By-ends, and are they not in the pillory together for our derision and our delight ?

In character, of course, the two men differed widely. Burns was as sincerely religious as Bunyan, though more intermittently so. Both had trouble in the management of their inner life and both experienced the anguish of self-torment and remorse. Did not Burns, in a letter to Mrs Riddell, cry out, much as Bunyan so often did, " from the region of hell and the horrors of the damned " ?

Of the two men, Bunyan on the whole was the sterner as a moralist. For all his native kindliness

of heart, he applied a strictly severe ethical code both to himself and to others; and he could not have endorsed Burns's passionate plea for a tolerant and indulgent attitude towards the frailties and shortcomings of human nature

> Then gently scan your brother man,
> Still gentler, sister woman;
> Tho' they may gang a kennin' wrang,
> To step aside is human.

That phrase, "a kennin' wrang," would not go deep enough for Bunyan. It would seem to him totally inadequate to describe the depravity of sin which we inherit from our first parents.

As for theological differences, Bunyan was a Calvinist, while Burns was an Arminian. The former, moreover, had had too many serious bouts with Apollyon ever to sympathise with Burns's whimsical attitude of humorous and indulgent *pity* for the arch-enemy of mankind. Otherwise, the seventeenth-century Englishman and the eighteenth-century Scotsman were kindred spirits. They would have agreed that—

> The heart aye's the part aye
> That makes us right or wrang,

with perhaps a strong reservation, on Bunyan's side, in favour of the conscience.

IV

The First Part of *The Pilgrim's Progress* was probably written in 1676, the Second Part in 1685.[1] This represents a difference between the forty-eighth and the fifty-fifth year of Bunyan's life. How far had Bunyan himself travelled, spiritually, during this interval, and what light does the later work throw upon the earlier ?

Most literary sequels turn out to be failures. Here our author ran considerable risk in writing a book which dealt with a theme similar to the first and which actually covered the same ground. This difficulty, however, Bunyan triumphantly surmounted. The characters which take part in the second journey being different, their adventures are different also. Meek, passive, feminine, and timid natures cannot so run as those that are more robust. For this reason, the Valley of the Shadow is passed in the daytime by Christiana and her companions, the fiend Apollyon being seen only in the distance. The Valley of Humiliation, too, has become a place beautified with lilies and plentifully supplied with the herb called heart's-ease. All this adds to the interest of the story. Much of the fascination of the Second Part arises from its references to what has already taken place in the First Part. We learn, for instance, that Christian

[1] Later editions of the First Part, it should be noted, contained much interesting matter not to be found in the first edition, including the characters of Mr Worldly Wiseman, Mr By-ends' relations, and the wife of Giant Despair. The Second Part was undertaken largely in order to supplant other spurious versions already in circulation.

gave battle to Apollyon in a narrow part of the valley "just beyond Forgetful Green." We are also told what were the names of the shepherds on the Delectable Mountains, as well as what were the subsequent fortunes of previously introduced characters, such as Obstinate, Pliable, and By-ends. It is to be noted that the spirit of Christian dominates the later book as it does the earlier. Though he himself has passed on, his fame and reputation are everywhere remembered, and one is made to feel that he is continually beckoning the second group of pilgrims to those good things whereto he has attained. This device gives a beautiful artistic unity to the entire work.

Moreover, the two parts supplement each other in that the first deals with the Christian life in its solitary aspect, the second in its social. However Christian may be companioned on his way, however he may be helped or hindered by those about him, in the end his pilgrimage is inevitably a lonely going. "Every man must bear his own burden." Bunyan here fully recognises the truth, which Cardinal Newman's *Dream of Gerontius* also exemplifies, that in the last resort, when we set out in quest of God, every one of us must fare forth as best he may—alone. But it is also true that we can travel to God only in company. The Christian life is essentially one of love and fellowship and service. We must learn to "bear one another's burdens," if we are ever to fulfil the law of Christ. The two parts, therefore, beautifully fit into each other.

> What *Christian* left lock't up, and went his way,
> Sweet *Christiana* opens with her Key.

It is in keeping with this that we are conscious of a marked difference in *pace* when we pass from the earlier narrative to the later. Christian is obviously in a great hurry. He cannot wait. He is like a man with his lamp lit and his loins girded, going to meet the Bridegroom. The necessity of fleeing from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City is far too urgent to admit of dallying. To those who would tempt him to linger by the way he replies by putting his fingers into his ears. There are consequently very few indications of pause in the First Part. Not even in any pleasant arbour by the way must a moment of precious time be wasted. So run that ye may *obtain!* The Second Part, on the other hand, gives one the impression of much greater leisureliness and ease. The company consists of women and children, for one thing, and the speed must be that of the weakest and the youngest. But there is more than that. We are told of a month being spent in the house of Gaius, while several years appear to elapse in the abode of Mr Mnason. Indeed, Christiana's boys have time to grow up during the journey, and even get married and have children of their own before the end is reached. It is probably for this reason that, though the two parts are about equal in length, the second *seems* to be much longer than the first.

Again, there is a noticeable increase of compassion and tenderness in the Second Part of *The Pilgrim's Progress* This may be because Bunyan is now convoying women and children to the Celestial City, or it may be because, after a lapse of nine years, he has himself become more sympathetic towards

human frailty. "I have learned of my Lord to be kind," remarks Gaius, "and have found by experience that I have gained thereby." Surely we are not mistaken in supposing these to be the sentiments of Bunyan himself. Moreover, the praise of women, and their services to Jesus, forms a remarkable feature of the Second Part. Lambs, babes, orphans receive frequent mention in this section, and it is here that we have full-length studies of such weak and timid characters as Mr Feeble-mind, Mr Ready-to-halt, Mr Dispondency, Mrs Much-afraid, and Mr Fearing. The shepherds are warmly commended by Great-heart for their tactful and loving concern for these sinking wayfarers, in that (as he says) "You have strewed their way into the Palace with Flowers, as you should." No character in the book is depicted with more exquisite tenderness than Mercy, who is young, bashful, timid to the last degree, ready to swoon with fear when things go ill, yet singing quietly to herself for very joy when things go well.

Further, every reader must notice that there is far more feasting and junketing in the second book than in the first. The pilgrims are merry and jocund as they take their journey. No wonder: as many as four weddings are celebrated by the way. At every turn princely hospitality is extended to the wanderers. They are handsomely lodged and entertained by lavishly disposed hosts. They meet in "a very fair dining-room," where excellent fare is put before them, butter and honey and "milk well crumbed." So pleasant, indeed, is the company, so delectable are the viands, that all sit round the table cracking

nuts, telling stories, opening riddles, till at last Old Honest drowsily nods as night wears itself out and dawn creeps stealthily up the eastern sky. Or it may be they are conducted to a spacious bed-chamber, where the air is so pleasant and the sound of bells so sweet, that no one ever dreams of sleep, yet all in the morning are as fresh as if they had slumbered.

Moreover, the Second Part of *The Pilgrim's Progress* resounds with music. Prudence can entertain the company on "a pair of excellent virginals." Christiana herself can discourse sweet music on the viol, and her daughter on the lute, so that even Mr Ready-to-halt is constrained to dance. "True, he could not dance without one Crutch in his hand, but I promise you he footed it well. Also the girl was to be commended, for she answered the Musick handsomely." Was it to the fine old English airs of Byrd and Lawes, one wonders, that the light-footed and light-hearted pilgrims thus disported themselves? Lest the company, however, should become too frivolous in the pursuit of such gaieties, Mr Great-heart gives reasons why the notes of the sackbut are more doleful than those of the other instruments; and he explains that, just as the musician touches the bass string first when he intends to put all in tune, so God plays first on the string of heaviness of mind "when he sets the soul in tune with himself."

Other evidences of mirth and geniality are not lacking. At one stage of their journey, the pilgrims are affectionately presented with nosegays of sweet flowers from the King's own garden, and their chamber is perfumed with spikenard and frankin-

eense and myrrh and other fragrant spices. Bunyan is even mindful to provide Mercy with a looking-glass and Christiana with a bracelet, while her daughters-in-law are made to step forth radiantly with earrings in their ears and jewels on their foreheads. Does all this indicate that, when he came to write the Second Part, "the secularisation and humanisation of the whole outlook on human life was beginning occasionally to break in" upon the soul of Bunyan?[1]

Finally, the Second Part of *The Pilgrim's Progress* strikes a rather more hopeful note than its predecessor did. Not only are the Christians in Vanity Fair more numerous now than they were formerly, and able to show themselves in the public streets (a sign that religion is beginning to be counted honourable), but also Giant Despair has been killed at last, and his castle demolished, while his head is set up on a pole by the wayside. Even the Monster of State persecution "has not made that havock of the Town-men's Children as formerly he has done; and it is verily believed by some, that the Beast will die of his Wounds." The Bunyan who wrote these words was no longer a prisoner, suffering martyrdom for his religious convictions. He was a free man, whose principles had won the day, and who, looking back gratefully and forward hopefully, felt that his sufferings had not been endured in vain.[2]

[1] J. W. Mackail, *John Bunyan*, p. 38.

[2] Space forbids any discussion of the possible sources of *The Pilgrim's Progress;* but attention may be drawn to an illuminating article in "The Contemporary Review" of October 1896, in which Mr Richard Heath seeks to derive both the framework and the ideas of the book from the influence on Bunyan of Anabaptist immigrants from the Continent. "The thoughts of a people slowly taking form through generations finally expressed themselves in him."

V

A brief section may be devoted to Bunyan's use of Scripture, as it is illustrated by *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Bunyan attached the greatest possible importance to detailed Biblical exposition in the fellowship of the Christian Church, and a sixth part of the entire bulk of *The Pilgrim's Progress* is concerned with what takes place in the Interpreter's House, and in the Palace Beautiful.

It is evident, to begin with, that our author delighted in Biblical references for their own sake, and liked to bring them in wherever possible. Does Christian stand weeping before the Cross? The reader must straightway be reminded of Zech. xii. 10. Does Christian overrun Faithful in the Valley of the Shadow? What an opportunity of being able to add that "so the first was the last"! Does Christian go back to the shady arbour for his lost treasure and thus needlessly traverse the same ground three times? So did the Israelites for their sin, when they were sent back again by the way of the Red Sea. Does Great-heart offer refreshment to Christiana and her sons? Then nothing will do but it must be right Scriptural fare, pomegranates and parched corn, figs and raisins, a wave-breast and a heave-shoulder. Some of these are mentioned in Leviticus, and profitable to be discoursed upon. The intelligent reader of Bunyan must needs possess a well-thumbed Bible. He should know at a glance who and what are alluded to in Hymenæus and Philetus; Hamor and Shechem; Ananias and Sapphira; Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.

Again, Bunyan evidently took a keen delight in the concrete imagery of Scripture. He was pleased by the picturesque, the luxuriant, the rhetorical. How he revelled, for example, in the Biblical descriptions of the Holy City, its palms, its harps, its robes, its crowns of purest gold, its gates of shining pearl! He was equally fascinated by the miscellaneous collection of Scriptural rarities and "engines" to be found in the armoury of the Palace Beautiful. To think of actually seeing Eve's apple and Jacob's ladder, Moses' rod and Jael's hammer, Gideon's pitcher and Shamgar's ox-goad, Samson's jawbone of an ass and the sling and stone wherewith David slew Goliath! In one place the course of the narrative is forcibly held up for half a page in order that Bunyan may give himself the pleasure of quoting in full the splendidly rhetorical passage in Job which describes the glory of the war-horse as it paweth in the valley, swalloweth the ground with fierceness, counteth darts as stubble, and laugheth at the shaking of a spear. "He saith among the trumpets, Ha, Ha; and he smelleth the battle afar off, the thunder of the captains and the shouting." Could any fine writing in the world compare with that?

Further, there is more than a suspicion, in some cases, that Bunyan invented an episode in his narrative in order to be able to clinch it with a choice and appropriate text of Scripture. We are puzzled, for example, by an incident in which a man of black flesh, wearing a white robe, entangles both Christian and Hopeful in a snare, until the explanation appears in a verse from the Book of Proverbs: "A man that

flattereth his neighbour spreadeth a net for his feet." The text, that is to say, has obviously suggested to Bunyan the episode which should illustrate it. Similarly, the not very convincing barking of a dog hinders Christiana at the outset of her journey. But who could resist the temptation to bring in that lovely verse from the Book of Psalms, which speaks about delivering " my darling from the power of the dog " ? This horrible barking, of course, signifies the efforts of the devil to prevent Christian prayer.

There are in the book some curious instances of extreme literalism of Biblical interpretation. Bunyan was convinced that Jesus of Nazareth subsisted on butter and honey in His youth, because Isa. vii. 15 says so. " Butter and honey shall he eat," are the very words. Could anything be more explicit ? " This was our Lord's dish when he was a child," remarks Gaius, in all good faith. Again, Bunyan seems to have been sorely puzzled for a long time by a verse in Leviticus which describes as unclean the animal which cheweth the cud but parteth not the hoof. At last the light dawned. Clearly this symbolised the spiritual condition of a man like Talkative. " He cheweth the Cud, he seeketh knowledge, he cheweth upon the Word ; but he divideth not the Hoof, he parteth not with the way of sinners ; but as the Hare, he retaineth the foot of a Dog or Bear, and therefore is unclean." [1] When the matter was thus lucidly explained by Faithful, Christian could but reply, gratefully, if

[1] A much fuller exposition of this mysterious verse is given in *Grace Abounding*, § 71.

a little dubiously, "You have spoken, for ought I know, the true Gospel sense of those texts."

One more instance of Bunyan's remarkable subtlety of Biblical exposition may be cited. In the Sermon on the Mount we are bidden, if we have two coats, to give away one of them. Does this refer only to actual, everyday garments? Surely not. It has an allegorical application also to Christ's perfect robe of righteousness. "Here is a righteousness that Christ, as God, as Man, as God-Man, has no need of, with reference to himself, and therefore he can spare it; a justifying righteousness that he for himself wanteth not, and therefore he giveth it away. . . . Our Lord indeed hath two coats, one for himself and one to spare; wherefore he freely bestows one upon the next poor beggar that he meets."

In this manner, as an expert commentator, Bunyan brought out of his treasure things new and old. Yet we should not let these curiosities (which are of great historical interest) blind us to the fact that in the main his exposition of Scripture was sound and evangelical. S. T. Coleridge has stated that he knew of no book he could so safely recommend as *The Pilgrim's Progress* "for teaching and enforcing the whole saving truth according to the mind that was in Christ Jesus." "It is, in my opinion, incomparably the best *Summa Theologia Evangelica* produced by a writer not miraculously inspired." [1]

[1] *Literary Remains*, vol. iii. pp. 391-2.

VI

Something should now be said about certain literary aspects of Bunyan's masterpiece.

The Pilgrim's Progress occupies an important place in the history of English prose fiction. Though not itself a novel, " in form and outline it bears something the same relation to the novel proper that the ' Morality ' bears to the drama proper." [1] Indeed, it is strangely connected with two distinct periods in the development of the story as a form of literature. On the one hand, its giants, dragons, enchantments, and hair-raising adventures, make it a late survival of the idealistic romances of chivalry which flourished in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. On the other hand, its humorously natural scenes, such as the description of Matthew's indigestion or the courtship of Mercy and Mr Brisk, make it an early anticipation of the realistic novel of manners which flourished in the eighteenth century. " As ideal as Spenser, as real as Defoe: such is Bunyan." [2] The resemblance of *The Pilgrim's Progress* to earlier books of chivalry, perhaps its actual indebtedness to them through chap-books read by Bunyan in his youth, has been admirably pointed out by Prof. C. H. Firth in his English Association Leaflet (No. 19) on John Bunyan. Where Bunyan departed from the romantic tradition was in writing for the English middle classes rather than for fine gentlemen and ladies; in making his characters real and not

[1] W. Raleigh, *The English Novel*, p. 116.
[2] George Saintsbury, *The English Novel*, p. 58.

frigidly artificial and conventional; and in substituting a religious for a sentimental interest. In the adoption of minute realistic detail to produce the illusion of actuality in a tale essentially romantic, *The Pilgrim's Progress* closely resembles *Robinson Crusoe*, another popular classic, written about forty years later.

Bunyan is a prince of story-tellers, and he gains his effects as the result of marvellous though quite unconscious art.[1] There are parts of *The Pilgrim's Progress* in which the allegory breaks down, or rather drops quite away, the marginal notes and monitory pointing fingers become forgotten, and we find ourselves passionately absorbed in the story for its own sake. Hallam calls *The Pilgrim's Progress* "the most perfect and complex of fairy tales," and Macaulay has said that Bunyan was "almost the only writer who ever gave to the abstract the interest of the concrete." By a series of exquisitely contrived climaxes—the lions chained, the burden loosened, the key of promise suddenly discovered in Hopeful's bosom, and so on—Bunyan keeps the reader spellbound from the enthralling opening of his tale to its dignified and majestic close. Plot, dialogue, character-drawing, and descriptive setting, four essential elements of the novel, are all interwoven with consummate skill. There is much art, for example, in the twice repeated insertion of news

[1] "Bunyan's glory is that he was at one and the same time a Puritan of burning conviction and an artist of irrepressible genius, and that in him the two elements for once coalesced. . . . To Bunyan art is not everything, art indeed is nothing. He is an artist only because he cannot help being one." J. W. Mackail, *John Bunyan*, pp. 17, 19.

respecting Mr Pliable, after he himself has disappeared from the narrative; and the introduction of Faithful, first as a mysterious voice speaking out of the darkness, and only afterwards as a bodily presence, is almost as thrilling as Robinson Crusoe's discovery of someone's footprint upon the sand. Well might Doctor Johnson remark to Boswell that *Don Quixote*, *Robinson Crusoe*, and *The Pilgrim's Progress* were the only three books in the world's literature that every reader would wish longer.

Besides being excellent as a piece of prose fiction, *The Pilgrim's Progress* abounds in essentially dramatic qualities. The dialogue is so life-like, the situations are so vivid to the mind's eye, the development of the plot is so absorbing, that one might have expected the whole book, without loss, to have been cast in the form of a play. Perhaps, had Bunyan lived in the days of Shakespeare, he would so have written it. As a matter of fact *The Pilgrim's Progress* has frequently been dramatised. A stage version, in four acts, by Mr C. G. Collingham, was produced at the Olympic Theatre, London, in December, 1896, and those who, like the present writer, saw George Macdonald acting the part of Great-heart, in a dramatic version written by his wife, during the 'eighties of last century, are not likely to forget the experience. Mr Greville Macdonald, describing this production, says that "Dean Stanley was high in praise of its sanctity, Burne-Jones of its beauty." [1]

There are parts of *The Pilgrim's Progress* that almost cry out for stage representation, for Bunyan quite evidently *saw* his characters in action. He

[1] *George Macdonald and his Wife*, p. 504.

noticed, to take one or two very minute examples, that the hands of the two pilgrims *shook* when they tried to look through the shepherds' perspective-glasses at the Celestial City, and that Christiana tasted the nauseous pill *with the tip of her tongue* before giving it to Matthew. Christiana, it will be remembered, on bidding farewell to her fellow-pilgrims, said something appropriate to each one of them. Only to Mr Stand-fast was she silent, but she gave him a ring. How beautifully reticent and dramatic is this touch! How one would love to witness the scene well acted!

Again, the language of *The Pilgrim's Progress* is so essentially dramatic, its speeches are so fitted to the characters who speak them, that Mr Bernard Shaw, who on the subject of dramatic technique may surely be taken as an authority, roundly asserts that in this respect Bunyan excels even Shakespeare. In illustration he quotes the words of Apollyon to Christian: "By this I perceive thou art one of my Subjects, for all that Country is mine, I am the Prince and God of it. How is it then that thou hast run away from thy King? Were it not that I hope thou mayest do me more service, I would strike thee now at one blow to the ground." Mr Shaw adds, "Here is no raving and swearing and rhyming and classical allusion. The sentences go straight to the mark; and their concluding phrases soar like the sunrise, or swing and drop like a hammer, just as the actor wants them." [1]

In spite of all this, *The Pilgrim's Progress* will never be adequately presented on the stage. Like

[1] G. Bernard Shaw, *Dramatic Opinions and Essays*, vol. i. p. 243.

King Lear, it is too grand. Besides, the man who wrote it, and stamped it with his genius, poured it first of all into the mould of narrative; and no one is big enough to recast it otherwise.

VII

Although Bunyan was no conscious artist, his minute study of the Bible gave him a perfect command of the English language, and he wielded a literary style which exactly fitted his ever-changing moods. Sometimes he wrote in a plain, straightforward, narrative style, of which the following is an excellent example:

> Then the Giant came up, and Mr Great-heart went to meet him; and as he went he drew his Sword, but the Giant had a Club. So without more ado they fell to it, and at the first blow the Giant stroke Mr Great-heart down upon one of his knees; with that the Women and Children cried out; so Mr Great-heart recovering himself, laid about him in full lusty manner, and gave the Giant a wound in his arm; thus he fought for the space of an hour to that height of heat, that the breath came out of the Giant's nostrils, as the heat doth out of a boiling Cauldron.

But Bunyan, when the occasion demanded it, could just as easily rise to a rapt, rhetorical, exclamatory style, a style well fitted to express his sense of transcendental realities.

> Now were these two men as 'twere in Heaven before they came to it, being swallowed up with the sight of

> Angels, and with hearing of their melodious notes. Here also they had the City itself in view, and they thought they heard all the Bells therein ring to welcome them thereto. But above all, the warm and joyful thoughts that they had about their own dwelling there, with such company, and that for ever and ever. Oh, by what tongue or pen can their glorious joys be expressed!

At will Bunyan could descend from these heights and write in a homely, intimate, familiar style. Few writers could put together words so saturated with emotional suggestion as he could. The following extract shows what a command he had over tenderness and pathos.

> When Mr Fearing was come to the Valley of the Shadow of Death, I thought I should have lost my man; not for that he had any inclination to go back, that he always abhorred, but he was ready to die for fear. O, the *Hobgoblins* will have me, the *Hobgoblins* will have me, cried he, and I could not beat him out on't. . . . But when he was come at the River where there is no Bridge, there again he was in a heavy case. Now, now, he said, he should be drowned for ever, and so never see that face with comfort that he had come so many miles to behold. And here also I took notice of what was very remarkable, the Water of that River was lower at this time than I ever saw it in my life. So he went over at last, not much above wet-shod.

It would be easy to cite examples of Bunyan's humorous style, or of his short, pithy, sententious, ironical style. Space, however, permits but a brief final reference to what can only be called his *magical* style. There are times when Bunyan's language takes on a shining, singing, inspired quality which

defies analysis. Part of the spell seems to consist in a kind of instinctive reticence of allusion, a catching of the breath, a resolve not to say too much, a skill in suggesting infinities that cannot be expressed in words. The following examples may be quoted, though every reader will have his own selection:

So I saw in my Dream, that just as Christian came up with the *Cross*, his Burden loosed from off his shoulders, and fell from off his back, and began to tumble, and so continued to do, till it came to the mouth of the Sepulchre, where it fell in and I saw it no more.

Thus they discoursed together till late at night; and after they had committed themselves to their Lord for protection, they betook themselves to rest: the Pilgrim they laid in a large upper chamber, whose window opened towards the Sun rising: the name of the chamber was Peace.

Then said their Guide, Do you hear him? I will dare to say, that this Boy lives a merrier life, and wears more of that Herb called *Heart's-ease* in his bosom, than he that is clad in Silk and Velvet.

When Mr Ready-to-halt came at the Brink of the River he said, *Now I shall have no more need of these Crutches, since yonder are Chariots and Horses for me to ride on.* The last words he was heard to say was, *Welcome Life.* So he went his way.

Now just as the Gates were opened to let in the men, I looked in after them, and behold, the City shone like the Sun; the Streets also were paved with Gold, and in them walked many men, with Crowns on their heads, Palms in their hands, and golden Harps to sing praises withal. There were also of them that had wings, and

they answered one another without intermission, saying, *Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord.* And after that they shut up the Gates. Which when I had seen, I wished myself among them.

VIII

It is doubtless possible to find minor defects in *The Pilgrim's Progress* from a literary point of view. For one thing, the allegory is in some places overdone; the parable employed is strained far beyond its natural capacity for symbolism. For example, when Bunyan makes the robin-redbreast, that picks up crumbs when it is in company but gobbles up horrid spiders when it is alone, an emblem of wicked "professors" who love to "sociate" with the godly yet secretly "swallow down sin like water," he is surely carrying things a little too far. The lesson to be drawn does not naturally arise from the illustration given. The same may be said of the four different calls which Bunyan supposes a hen to give to its chickens.

Again, from the point of view of a work of art, the allegory itself is frequently overloaded with didactic explanation. Properly speaking, an allegory should explain itself. It ought not to need any elaborate unfolding of its significance. But the reader of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, if he is quite candid with himself, is occasionally bored by tedious disquisitions designed to drive home the moral of the tale. Do we not weary of the four carefully explained theological reasons why Little-faith resembled Esau, or of the four respects in which true fear is to be

distinguished from false fear? In these and many other passages Bunyan forgets his allegory and turns to sermon-writing. He is lured away from his story by the opportunity it presents for moral and spiritual exhortation.

Bunyan's defence might be twofold. On the one hand, he might say (as he does) that these arguments and disquisitions are intended to while away the time during a long journey, especially when the pilgrims are passing through the Enchanted Ground. Faithful himself is nigh to yawning as they traverse that region, "whose air naturally tended to make one drowsy." On the other hand, Bunyan might argue that he *meant* the artistic element in his book to be subordinate to the moral and religious. He was willing to prepare the most enticing bait; but, after all, the purpose of the bait is to conceal a hook, and it is the hook, not the bait, that is the important thing.

> You see the ways the Fisher-man doth take
> To catch the Fish; what Engines doth he make?
>
> . . . . .
>
> They must be groped for, and be tickled too,
> Or they will not be catch'd, whate'er you do.

To read *The Pilgrim's Progress* as a delightful tale, and to neglect or despise its vehement and insistent religious application of the allegory, is to miss its whole significance, and to confirm Bunyan's own statement, made elsewhere, that "the Philistines understand me not." Others have

written books that he who runs may read: Bunyan has written that he who reads may run.

Whatever we may think of the literary character of *The Pilgrim's Progress* as a work of art, nothing can detract from its splendid qualities as a religious classic. How full it is of profound spiritual wisdom and ripe experience! What other writer has so cunningly explored for us the secret mysteries of our own hearts? We know, after reading this book, as we never knew before, that the Christian life is a hazardous and valiant enterprise, that the soul's chief peril lies in false security, that there is a right and a wrong way out of the Slough of Despond, that "the soul of religion is the practick part," that the descent of Hill Difficulty is harder even than its ascent, and that it is quite possible to slip back to hell from the very gate of heaven.

The Pilgrim's Progress is a book for the learned and for the ignorant, for the foolish and for the wise. It enchants us in our childhood and more than satisfies us in our old age. When we are very young, we read it for the story and readily contrive to skip the preaching parts. Later, we come upon unsuspected veins of gold in tracts we had formerly passed over. When we first read this book (such is our youthful ignorance) we think that we ourselves are Christian and that the accompanying discreditable characters are all the other people. But more and more as we read it (such is our growing wisdom), we find, alas, that *we* are Mr By-ends, Mr Formalist, Mr Hypocrisy, or it may be Mr Fearing, and not the stalwart pilgrim

we once thought we were. If that is the result of a more careful reading, perhaps it is precisely what Bunyan himself intended.

O then, come hither,
And lay my Book, thy Head, and Heart together.

CHAPTER FIVE

JOHN BUNYAN: WRITER OF BOOKS

I

It was no small achievement that an obscure village brazier, who had but the scantiest opportunities of education, and who "soon lost that little he learnt, even most utterly," should nevertheless give to the world as many as sixty books and pamphlets, of which at least four were to be widely read three hundred years after his birth, while one was to be translated into more foreign languages than any other book except the Bible. The bulk of Bunyan's writing, apart from his four masterpieces, makes very dull reading at the present day. Most of it is prosy, homiletical exposition, overloaded with Scriptural quotation, and not for a moment to be compared with the golden sermons of Jeremy Taylor, or even the silver ones of John Tillotson, his contemporaries. No, the kindly dust of oblivion has long ago settled down upon *Solomon's Temple Spiritualized*, *The Jerusalem Sinner Saved*, *A Few Sighs from Hell: or the Groans of a Damned Soul*, in spite of the alluring titles given to these treatises.

There remain two important books to which some reference, however brief, must here be made. *The Holy War*, published in 1682, is an elaborate account

of the conflict between good and evil. The City of Mansoul, after a period of happy allegiance to King Shaddai, is betrayed by its guards and captured by Diabolus. Prince Emmanuel, Son of King Shaddai, thereupon comes with a large army and recovers possession. The town is remodelled and new officers are appointed, to the manifest joy of all its inhabitants. Presently, however, riches increase, carnal security flourishes, and languor supervenes, so that Emmanuel deserts the city He has redeemed. At this point an army of persecuting enemies beset Mansoul and demand that it shall surrender. Urgent messages are sent by a faithful few to the absent Emmanuel, who once more returns and promises to set up the town in His own country in such strength and glory as had never been known before.

The Holy War exhibits in a marked degree the robust, manly quality of Bunyan's religious genius. There are some memorable passages in the book, notably the description of the stagnation that attends the absence of Emmanuel from Mansoul, and the joy that follows His return. Also, the yearning love of Christ for the souls of men, His grief over sin, His infinite patience and long-suffering forbearance, His offer of unimaginable glories in the world to come, have seldom been more forcibly or pleadingly expressed than in the eloquent address with which the book closes.

The theme of *The Holy War* lent itself less easily to allegorical treatment than that of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, and it was impossible for even Bunyan to make the immense number of abstract personages introduced into the narrative appear like flesh and

blood. Yet the chief interest of the book for us to-day lies in its masterly delineation of those characters that do stand out clearly. Mr Conscience, Recorder of Mansoul, who used to roar like a lion and make all the city quake when his fits were upon him, and who could only be completely silenced when he was debauched; Mr Illpause, orator of Diabolus, whose stinking breath alone was enough to bring about the death of my Lord Innocency; Mr Anything, faithful to neither side, who "had for his malapertness one of his legs broken, and he that did it wished it had been his neck"; Mr Wet-eyes, "a poor man, a man of a broken spirit—yet one that could speak well to a petition"; Mr Carnal-security, a chatty, companionable man, who lured the people of Mansoul away from Emmanuel to joyous feasting and a care-free life; and Mr Godly-fear, a thundering preacher, and sender of petitions to Emmanuel, "now but little set by though formerly one of great request"—are all of them vivid characterisations, in Bunyan's best manner.

It is an interesting circumstance that Mr Rudyard Kipling, in a poem entitled "The Holy War," has represented John Bunyan as a man who anticipated, hundreds of years beforehand, all that the Great War of 1914–1918 was able to reveal to us about human nature:

A Tinker out of Bedford,
A vagrant out of quod,
A private under Fairfax,
A minister of God—

Two hundred years and thirty
Ere Armageddon came,
His single hand portrayed it,
And Bunyan was his name!

The Life and Death of Mr Badman, published in 1680, is a very different kind of book. Bunyan himself intended it to be a sequel and contrast to *The Pilgrim's Progress*, but it is not really an allegory, like that masterpiece. It is rather Bunyan's nearest approach to a realistic novel, and it must have prepared hundreds of readers for the works of Henry Fielding and Tobias Smollett in the generation following.

Mr Badman is the typical scoundrel of seventeenth-century England as Bunyan knew him. In childhood he is given to lying, pilfering, and profanity. As an apprentice he robs his master and seduces a member of his family. Started in business for himself, he gets into debt, becomes bankrupt, marries a rich wife, defrauds his creditors, cheats his customers, breaks his leg in a drunken fit, contracts a second marriage with a low hussy, and finally dies ruined and unrepentant. Bunyan's shrewd insight into human nature and skill in portraying character are very conspicuous in this book. Mr Kipling, as we have seen, is temperamentally attracted by the splendour and bravado of *The Holy War;* Robert Browning was no less fascinated by the vivid character-drawing of *The Life and Death of Mr Badman.* His poem entitled "Ned Bratts" is a dramatic reproduction and enlargement of an incident taken from that book. But what a difference there is between Bunyan's plain, straightforward prose and the

tormented metrical and psychological subtleties of Browning's later verse!

II

The prose style of Bunyan, which merits fuller treatment than it could receive in the chapter devoted to *The Pilgrim's Progress*, may be said to have two leading characteristics.

In the first place, it is a style saturated with the speech of the Authorised Version of the Bible. Bunyan had a very small library. Apart from the two books his wife brought him, Foxe's *Booke of Martyrs*, Luther's *Commentary on Galatians*, Quarles's *Emblems*, Bernard's *Isle of Man*, and *A Relation of the Fearful Estate of Francis Spira*, we do not know that he possessed any books at all. He himself states that "I have not fished in other men's waters; my Bible and Concordance are my only library in my writings."[1] Bunyan did not feel that this was in any sense a limitation. To him the Bible was "kingdom large enough," and a better model of beautiful and lucid English could not have been found. It may be true that Bunyan "never went to school to Aristotle and Plato," as he himself puts it; but it would be a complete mistake to speak of him as an illiterate person. No man who knows his Bible from cover to cover can be called uneducated.

The second characteristic of Bunyan's prose style is its closeness to the ordinary speech of common

[1] Preface to *Solomon's Temple Spiritualized*.

people. It is the good, honest Saxon of Latimer, Defoe, Cobbett, and John Bright. At the time when he was writing, English literary prose was passing out of its quaintly elaborated and pedantic phase, as exemplified by Thomas Fuller, Robert Burton, and Sir Thomas Browne, and was entering upon its clarified, exact, orderly, and lucid phase, as exemplified by Isaac Barrow, John Dryden, and Joseph Addison. It is strange that John Dryden, one of the greatest masters of the easy, polished, familiar style in our language, should be only three years younger than John Bunyan himself. But all these influences passed far over the head of the Bedford brazier and preacher. He did not aspire to any style at all, save that of the common people around him.

In his Preface to *The Holy City* Bunyan apologises to the reader for not having "beautified his matter with acuteness of language," borrowed from learned authors. "I durst not make use of ought thereof," he writes, "and that for fear lest that grace and these gifts that the Lord hath given me, should be attributed to their wits rather than the light of the Word and the Spirit of God: wherefore I will not take of them from a thread even to a shoe-latchet, lest they should say, We have made Abram rich." Similarly, in his Preface to *Grace Abounding* he says: "I could have stepped into a style much higher than this in which I have here discoursed, and could have adorned all things more than here I have seemed to do, but I dare not. God did not play in convincing of me, the devil did not play in tempting of me, neither did I play when I sunk as into a bottomless pit, when the pangs of hell caught hold upon me;

wherefore I may not play in my relating of them, but be plain and simple, and lay down the thing as it was." This avowal explains the homely colloquialism, the racy vigour, the plain but never vulgar rusticity of much of Bunyan's writing. In Bunyan's style no trace of art or of artifice intervenes between the thought in his mind and its utterance in words. His way of saying a thing is quite indistinguishable from the thing he wants to say. What his eye saw clearly, or his soul felt keenly, his pen could express vividly and accurately, as with the few necessary strokes of a finely drawn etching. He knew how to "lay down the thing as it was." Lord Macaulay's tribute to Bunyan's style is not too complimentary: "For magnificence of pathos, for vehement exhortation, for subtle disquisition, for every purpose of the poet, the orator, and the divine, this homely dialect, the dialect of the plain working-man, was perfectly sufficient."

A few illustrations of Bunyan's pungent and pithy use of the vernacular may be taken from *The Life and Death of Mr Badman*. That gentleman, we are told, "was all on a dung sweat" on one occasion. This is probably a corruption for "dung wet," meaning "wet completely through, like dung," an expression applied elsewhere in the literature of the period to soldiers on a campaign. Use is also made of the phrase "damn-me blades," the word "blade" meaning a rollicking, free-and-easy fellow, and occurring both in *Romeo and Juliet* and in Pepys's *Diary* (1667). Other popular expressions are, "They would egg him to the alehouse and yet make him a jack-pay-for-all." "They are a shame to religion,

these slithy, rob-shop, pick-pocket men," "Such beastly queans are a deadly thing to young men," "He moultered away and went rotten to his grave." "It is ill puddling in the cockatrice's den."

As might naturally be expected, Bunyan's writing abounds in proverbial and pregnant sayings. The following are taken from *Mr Badman*. "I know that the better end of the staff is mine." "And so they brought their noble to ninepence" (an allusion to a coin worth 6s. 8d., introduced in the time of Edward III). "As poor as howlets." "As like as an egg is like an egg." "As common as four eggs a penny." "He that loseth his good sheep for a half-pennyworth of tar" (the original form of the expression; the modern "ship" first arose from a dialect pronunciation of the word "sheep").

It is curious how many of the popular sayings quoted in this book contain an allusion to the Prince of Darkness. The following are examples: "The devil is a cunning schoolmaster." "They get, as we say, the devil and all by their getting." "This is like the proverb: The devil corrects vice." "Give the devil his due." "A drunkard, a thief, are the devil's baits." "Like to like, quoth the devil to the collier."

III

It was perhaps the homespun plainness of this manner of writing that led William Cowper, in 1784, about a century after Bunyan's death, to keep back the name of the brazier of Bedford from some lines devoted to his praise.

I pleased remember, and, while memory yet
Holds fast her office here, can ne'er forget,
Ingenious dreamer, in whose well-told tale
Sweet fiction and sweet truth alike prevail;
Whose humorous vein, strong sense, and simple style
May teach the gayest, make the gravest smile;
Witty, and well employed, and, like thy Lord,
Speaking in parables His slighted word;
I name thee not lest so despised a name
Should move a sneer at thy deservèd fame,
Yet, e'en in transitory life's late day
That mingles all my brown with sober grey,
Revere the man whose PILGRIM marks the road
And guides the PROGRESS of the soul to God.[1]

Compare with this the air of lofty disparagement adopted by the aristocratic David Hume in the following words: "Whoever would assert an equality of genius and elegance between Ogilvy and Milton, or Bunyan and Addison, would be thought to defend no less an extravagance than if he had maintained a molehill to be as high as Teneriffe, or a pond as extensive as the ocean. Though there may be found persons who give the preference to the former authors, no one pays attention to such a taste; and we pronounce, without scruple, the sentiments of these pretended critics to be absurd and ridiculous."[2] Burke, in like manner, referred to those who might appreciate the refined language of Virgil's *Æneid* "if it were degraded into the style of *The Pilgrim's Progress*."[3] Among modern writers J. A. Froude, with a slight touch of disdain, has

[1] *Tirocinium*, ll. 133-146.
[2] "Essay on the Standard of Taste," in *Works* (1882), vol. i. p. 269.
[3] *Essay on the Sublime and Beautiful.*

alluded to Bunyan as "the Poet-apostle of the English middle classes, imperfectly educated like himself."[1]

With these depreciatory sentiments may be compared the views of Mr G. Bernard Shaw, who sounds a loud trumpet in praise of Bunyan's style. "All that you miss in Shakespeare you find in Bunyan, to whom the true heroic came quite obviously and naturally. . . . Take one of Shakespeare's big fighting scenes and compare its blank verse, in point of mere rhetorical strenuousness, with Bunyan's power. Macbeth's famous cue for the fight with Macduff runs:

> Yet I will try the last: before my body
> I throw my warlike shield. Lay on, Macduff,
> And damned be him that first cries Hold, enough!

Turn from this jingle, dramatically right in feeling, but silly and resourceless in thought and expression, to Apollyon's cue for the fight in the Valley of Humiliation: 'I am void of fear in this matter. Prepare thyself to die; for I swear by my infernal Den, that thou shalt go no further; here will I spill my soul.' This is the same thing done masterly. Apart from its superior grandeur, force, and appropriateness, it is better claptrap and infinitely better word-music."[2]

Better than Shakespeare! This is praise indeed from our most eminent living dramatist, and a great advance on the timid encomiums of the poet Cowper. The whirligig of time has brought its revenges.

[1] *John Bunyan*, p. 176.
[2] G. B. Shaw, *Dramatic Opinions and Essays*, vol. i. p. 142.

IV

A few of Bunyan's poems have found their way into modern hymn-books and collections of verse. Three of them are included in Mr Walter de la Mare's exquisite anthology, *Come Hither*. Bunyan rather prided himself on his skill in versification and wrote a long poem of seventy stanzas, which he entitled "Prison Meditations." He also wrote unreadable prefaces in verse to several of his works. His best poetical productions are the songs he inserted in the Second Part of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. The Shepherd Boy in the Valley of Humiliation sings the praises of sweet content in a manner that recalls some of the best lines in Elizabethan poetry:

He that is down need fear no fall;
He that is low, no pride;
He that is humble ever shall
Have God to be his guide.

The song of Mr Valiant-for-truth, later in the book, is strongly reminiscent of some verses in Shakespeare's *As You Like It:*

Who would true valour see,
Let him come hither;
One here shall constant be,
Come wind, come weather.
There's no discouragement
Shall make him once relent,
His first avow'd intent
To be a pilgrim.

A good proportion of Bunyan's exercises in the art of poetry was devoted to the edification of youth.

The seventeenth century, on the whole, was poorly supplied with children's books. The juvenile of the period, alas, had no well-filled shelf laden with such treasures as *Alice in Wonderland*, *Grimm's Fairy Tales*, *The Child's Garden of Verses*, or *The Rose and the Ring*. Nor was his nursery floor strewn with any splendid masterpieces of colour and design, such as Randolph Caldecott, Kate Greenaway, Walter Crane, Charles Robinson, and Leslie Brooke have so lavishly produced for the delight of the children of to-day. Even our fathers' favourite nursery-books, *Sandford and Merton*, *Robinson Crusoe*, and *Gulliver's Travels*, were not yet in being, and the joy of gazing upon Thomas Bewick's illustrations to *Æsop's Fables*, or of learning by heart the *Divine and Moral Songs* of Isaac Watts, was an experience to be reserved for the youngsters of a succeeding generation. The seventeenth-century child was born two hundred years before Froebel was ever heard of, and was hardly deemed important enough to have books written and published for his own special benefit. For the most part, the juvenile literature of the century was morbid, insipid, and wearisomely didactic. To direct the child into paths of morality and religion, by lures, by birch-rods, or by picture-books, was the generally avowed object of all pedagogic effort.

With these aims and ideals Bunyan was in hearty sympathy. He had six children of his own and his manner of bringing them up may be inferred from the instruction given to Christiana's boys in *The Pilgrim's Progress*. A child was to be well grounded in the Catechism first of all, and to know that God

the Father saves us " by his Grace " ; God the Son, "by his Righteousness, Death, and Blood, and Life" ; and God the Holy Ghost, " by his Illumination, by his Renovation, and by his Preservation." He should also be interested in all kinds of evangelical riddles and Scripture puzzles, and be able, on occasion, to give expression to pious and wise aphorisms, in the manner of his elders. Bunyan seems to have been very fond of educating his children by calling their attention to the moral lessons to be drawn from common objects. The cloud, the spider, the robin, the cock, the candle, are all introduced to Christiana's boys as having a spiritual suggestiveness peculiarly suited to the comprehension of youthful minds.

The popularity of *The Pilgrim's Progress* seems to have led Bunyan to contemplate the publication of a book for children only. If a larger number of emblems could be collected and material things spiritualised, if their significance could be wooingly set forth in the form of poetry, and if each poem could be illustrated by a simple woodcut, not too artistic, might not the book be one which a child would hail with delight, and which would train him up diligently in the way he ought to go ?

The result was a tiny volume which appeared in 1686, two years before Bunyan's death, entitled *Country Rhymes : A Book for Boys and Girls, by J. B.* In this book the child is accompanied through the ordinary scenes and incidents of domestic life by a mentor who not only finds " sermons in stones and good in everything," but who assiduously squeezes out of the said stones the last drop of

sermon they are calculated to produce. A favourable example of the descriptive writing (without the sermon) may be given :

ON THE GOING DOWN OF THE SUN.

What, hast thou run thy Race? Art going down?
Thou seemest angry, why dost on us frown?
Yea wrap thy head in Clouds, and hide thy face
As threatening to withdraw from us thy Grace?
Oh leave us not ! When once thou hid'st thy head,
Our Horizon with darkness will be spread.
Tell's, who hath thee offended ? Turn again :
Alas! too late—Entreaties are in vain !

Usually Bunyan is not quite so good as this, and the book as a whole is a kind of religious Æsop in poor doggerel. Does the child notice an egg, for example, as he is strolling one day through his father's farmyard ? Then he is called upon to reflect thus upon it :

The egg's no chick by falling from the hen ;
Nor man a Christian, till he's born again.
The egg's at first contained in the shell ;
Men, before Grace, in sin and darkness dwell.
The egg, when laid, by warmth is made a chicken ;
And Christ, by Grace, those dead in sin doth quicken.

Does the flint lie in the bed of a running stream, and still remain obdurate ? Why then,

This flint an emblem is of those that lie
Like stones, under the Word, until they die.

Even games, it seems, may be made educative, and when a boy takes up a whip to scourge his top, he is invited to turn his thoughts to that most

mistaken of all deluded sinners, the man who thinks to be saved by virtue of his own good works:

> Our legalist is like unto this top,
> Without a whip he doth not duty do;
> Let Moses whip him, he will skip and hop
> 'Tis with the whip the top is made to go.

As for the frog, we expect it to be the emblem of something peculiarly loathsome and hideous. And so it is:

> The frog by nature is both damp and cold,
> Her mouth is large, her belly much will hold.
> She sits somewhat ascending, loves to be
> Croaking in gardens, though unpleasantly.
> The Hypocrite is like unto this frog,
> As like as is the puppy to the dog.
> He is of nature cold, his mouth is wide
> To prate, and at true Goodness to deride.
> He mounts his head as if he were above
> The World, when 'tis that which has his love.
> And though he seeks in Churches for to croak,
> He neither loveth Jesus nor his yoke.

As one turns over the faded pages of this old book, a copy of which, in the original edition, may be seen in the British Museum, one wonders what its first owner really thought of it. Did the little Puritan child who received it in 1686, perhaps as a birthday gift, value it for its pictures, or for its poetry, or for its theology? After reading it through, was he mindful to meditate duly on the sunrise, and the snail, and the penny loaf, just in the manner suggested, when he next saw them? Did he really believe,

on beholding a horrid spider, that he himself was as full of sin as that creature was of venom? And did he ever ask himself, with surprise, why the huge whipping-top in the picture was made quite as large as a house, and ten times larger than a windmill? Perhaps not. That good angel which sits up aloft, taking care of little children, no doubt enabled the Reuben and Rebecca of those days to digest just what was beneficial in the book, and to reject the rest. The pictures would be all right, for no child ever asks for verisimilitude in drawings which it likes. As for the morals, really they were so obvious, or so very dull, that perhaps they could be skipped. In vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird. Probably our serious little friend, when set to learn these verses for his Sunday lesson, would absorb just enough of the book to strengthen that strain of grave Puritanism which is so valuable an element in our English character, but not enough to develop within him the vices of priggishness and bigotry and pride. Then, let us hope, when his lesson had been duly conned, he would turn with eager zest to that other book of Bunyan's which he far preferred, the book which he was permitted to read on Sundays and which yet was interesting, the book with a real live story in it about lions, and adventures, and the fiend Apollyon, and the dungeon of Giant Despair in Doubting Castle.

CHAPTER SIX

JOHN BUNYAN: THEN AND NOW

Mr George Bernard Shaw, in his dramatic masterpiece, has invited us to reflect on what we should say to Joan of Arc, if she were again to appear amongst us. The same idea might be profitably applied to the subject of our present study, with this qualification: that it is more important to reflect on what Bunyan might think of us than of what we ourselves might think of him. He, of course, like every other human being who has ever lived, was the child of his own age, and cannot properly be transported into any other. Doubtless the return of so uncompromising a Puritan would no more conduce to our spiritual comfort and peace of mind than would the return of Thomas Carlyle, for example, or Oliver Cromwell, or John Knox. This may be true; and yet, as Lord Rosebery remarks in a fascinating essay, "We could find employment for some Cromwells now." Bunyan would certainly be bewildered at finding himself in the twentieth century, precisely as we should be if we could leap into the twenty-third. Yet the thought of his imagined presence in our midst may be the best way of trying to sum up the lessons of his life. What would he think of the England of to-day?

THEN AND NOW

I

Passing over the merely external aspects of our changing civilisation, and keeping to the religious sphere, we may surely say that Bunyan would be gratified at the extent to which the principles for which he fought have held their ground. Nonconformity has won its battle. Believers in voluntaryism and independency in religion are no longer proscribed and persecuted by the State. They can organise themselves freely, build splendid churches, and worship God as they please. Bunyan might possibly wonder, however, why this dearly-bought liberty is not now more widely appreciated than it is. His imprisonment helped to secure for Englishmen the *right* to worship. Where is the gain, if they no longer *desire* to worship? The meagre attendances at religious services, the brief popular sermons, not always dealing with vital Gospel themes, might well puzzle our visitor from the seventeenth century. On the other hand, the interest of modern Nonconformity in foreign missions would be a new and a wonderful thing to Bunyan.

Again, Bunyan would probably be greatly perturbed by the apparent decay among us of the sense of sin. His own overwhelming and shattering consciousness of guilt seems largely to have disappeared from the world to-day. Yet this was an integral element in the Christian religion, as Bunyan conceived it, and he could not have understood a pilgrim purporting to set out to the Celestial City without a burden on his back. It would be difficult

to explain to Bunyan the causes that have brought about this modern change of emphasis. What would he make of the doctrine of evolution and immanental monism? Or of the God whose seat is in the human breast rather than on the great white throne? One can imagine Bunyan picking up Professor Otto's valuable book, *The Idea of the Holy*, and reading it with amazement. The *idea* of the holy! A projection of the human mind, to be psychologically explained and learnedly discussed! Bunyan, we may be sure, would shut the book with a snap and a rough gesture, saying to himself: "The old is better." He would be wrong in doing so. The modern mind must see its own truth in its own way. Yet there would be an element of value in Bunyan's challenge. Where to-day is the sentiment of awe and fear in the presence of One who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity? It is the holy, preservative, ethically pure element in the perfect love of God, its negative reaction to every kind of evil, that finds such conspicuous and costly manifestation in the cross of Christ. Indeed, the holiness of God and the sin of man are correlates: if we lose our sense of the one, we are likely to lose our consciousness of the other. Perhaps, later on, they will come back together, along modern lines of social disillusionment and unrest. The revived feeling that there is something radically wrong with us, that "the whole head is sick and the whole heart faint," may drive us once more to fruitful penitence, and a sense of corporate guilt before God, which is something very much more than a vague irresponsible consciousness of social disease in the body politic.

John Bunyan will come to his own again when we rise to the thought of a God who can condemn. The God whom the modern mind is disposed to worship (if it can be called worship) is One who strives, in partnership with ourselves, towards some distant but very nebulously conceived goal. We have need to learn that only the God who is holy enough to judge can also be mighty and gracious enough to save.

Once more, Bunyan would probably be alarmed to-day at the lack of concern for *personal* religion. His own message was urgently addressed to the individual; he could not have understood a communal salvation. Our modern emphasis is on the social aspects and implications of Christianity. Probably these have been too much neglected in the past, and attention to them was overdue. But Bunyan might be pardoned for believing, with William Wilberforce, John Howard, and other Evangelicals of the beginning of the nineteenth century, that religion is primarily an affair between a man and his Maker, and that even social and philanthropical reforms are best promoted by personal religion and individual conversion. The man who in his own inner life is reconciled to God is most likely in his outer life to find himself speedily in right relations with his fellow-men.

Another strange thing, in Bunyan's eyes, would be the modern rebound from other-worldliness to this-worldliness. "The pilgrim," says Dr T. R. Glover, "seems to be dropping out of our religious conceptions." [1] The majority of Christians to-day

[1] T. R. Glover, *The Pilgrim*, p. 11.

are not such as "declare plainly that they seek a city" beyond the skies, or indeed anywhere else than in this present world. As George Meredith sorrowfully noted a generation ago, ours is an age of "the unlit lamp and the ungirt loin." Men feel to-day that, instead of disparaging the world as it is, or fleeing from it as from a City of Destruction, they should make the best of it, and try to exploit its resources to the full. Why not a Celestial City, or at least a Garden City, on *this* side of the River of Death? Why always a Jerusalem the Golden? In this respect the twentieth century is not so different from the seventeenth as we might imagine. For people who take life seriously, religion is always a striving and a reaching forward. It requires as strenuous a discipline to seek "the things that are above" in this life, as to seek "the things that are beyond" in a life to come. Are they not the same things in the end? Must it not be that the infinite and eternal things beckon and await us yonder just *because* they are above us here and now? In either case, whether it be a case of "upwards" or of "onwards," the pursuit of high ideals is the same in all ages and remains a pilgrimage still. As Bunyan says: "The way's the way, and there's an end."

Once more, there can be little doubt that Bunyan at the present day would be greatly perplexed by our modern attitude to the Bible. He could not be expected to grasp the causes that have led us to our modern standpoint, such as the patient investigations of textual criticism, historical research, and the study of comparative religion. But he would be fully entitled to comment on the alarming

practical result, that the more the Bible is "explained" in this modern sense, the less it appears to be read! It has become a document, with other documents of history, and no longer what it was to himself—a scroll of doom. In Bunyan's view, we may be sure, no amount of critical appreciation of the Bible as a piece of literature could ever compensate for its ceasing to be studied with fear and trembling as the oracles of God. Here, unfortunately, our difficulties begin where Bunyan's ended. However much we might wish to do so, it is to-day impossible for us to regard the Scriptures as a body of equally inspired oracles, to be literally and mechanically applied to every conceivable situation of human life. "We are not likely to see in the Bible just what Bunyan did—a dramatic commentary on our lives in all its details." [1] Yet this studious and personally concerned literalism of interpretation had enormous advantages. It made us in the seventeenth century—what, alas, we are no longer—a Bible-reading and a Bible-loving people.

Finally, Bunyan could not but feel deep misgivings and searchings of heart, if confronted to-day by certain modern conceptions of Jesus Christ. To one accustomed to take the Calvinistic view of Christ's atoning work, and imputed righteousness, it would seem strange and perplexing to read of "value judgments," "divinity through the subconscious self," "the alleged authentic sayings in Q," "Jesus *or* Christ." Breathlessly John Bunyan would ask: "Is He a Redeemer still? What avails all this minute rediscovery of the historic Christ, supposing

[1] H. Wheeler Robinson, *The Life and Faith of the Baptists*, p. 13.

it to be accurate, if men have not a saving knowledge of His grace? Does our study of Him as a first-century Jew exempt or screen us from His scrutiny of us as our eternal Judge? Is this 'comrade' Christ any longer One of whom it may be said, 'And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as one dead'?"

Perhaps, after discussion, our differences regarding Christ would appear to be less than might be supposed. It is certainly true that, theologically speaking, things have changed. The doctrinal framework of Bunyan's *Grace Abounding* is largely obsolete to-day. But so is that of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, written at the same time. It is a remarkable fact that, whereas the theological landmarks of *The Pilgrim's Progress* have become altered almost beyond recognition since Bunyan's time, both by the slow erosion of more than two centuries, and also (since Darwin) by the violent upheaval of a new conception of the universe, its spiritual and imaginative landmarks remain practically unchanged. Bunyan's approach to Christ through Calvinism, then, is no longer ours. It has become increasingly difficult to think of Him as One who, on the stage of universal history, played a spectacular and self-conscious part in a prearranged drama of salvation for the entire race. This is not the place to discuss these questions fully. Suffice it to say that our conception of Christ tends to be ethical where Bunyan's was transactional and transcendental. We approach from the standpoint of history One whom Bunyan begins by regarding as super-historic. We are disposed to view as a process what Bunyan thought

of as a single act. But may not these differences be part of the fullness which *all* the ages are needed to supply to the complete unfolding of the significance of God in Christ? No one phase or epoch can exhaust Him. He requires the interpretation of the twentieth century no less than of the seventeenth or of the first, so infinitely variegated are the riches of His grace. Probably an impartial investigation would demonstrate that our age loves and adores Christ quite as much as Bunyan's did, if not more. Interpretations change, conflicting theories come and go, like clouds that traverse and obscure the heavens. But still the Light of the World shines on, a sun of righteousness with healing in its wings.

II

Having dealt thus briefly with some of the criticisms John Bunyan might pass on the religious conditions of to-day, we may now, in a few closing sentences, consider what it is he has specially to bequeath to us.

In the first place, surely we may learn from him the importance of the *imagination* in the religious life. There is far more poetry in Christianity than most people suppose; and although the imagination, as Bunyan would be the first to admit, must be firmly subordinated to the conscience in religion, that still leaves it the widest and most ample range. Was it not, for example, a marvellously bold and splendid exercise of the imagination that enabled Him who was despised and rejected of men to see

Himself in the throne of His glory, waving mankind to the right hand and to the left? We shall best celebrate the tercentenary of Bedford's immortal dreamer, not by a vain attempt to revive his theological opinions, but rather by an effort to exercise more fully our God-given faculty of seeing things spiritual glimmering everywhere through things material, commonplace, and familiar. We need to-day that general enlivening and irradiation of human life which only the awakened imagination can bestow. If the truth were told, Sir James Barrie is doing for our own day, though in a totally different manner, very much what Bunyan did for his. He is enabling us, by sheer wizardry of the imagination, to see that which is invisible, and to believe that the spiritual world is indubitably real. Humanity to-day is as truly encompassed by the chariots of the Lord as ever it was in the days of Bunyan or of Elisha. Well may we pray to have the eyes of our understanding opened that we may behold them.

In the second place, if Bunyan can give us imagination, he can also give us *courage*. His whole message to us is that the Christian life is a strenuous, unremitting combat with unseen foes, and that "none can enter into life but such as are in down-right earnest." No man who has read Bunyan can ever again believe that he is going to stroll casually into heaven with his hands in his pockets. He must run for it. Yes, and he must be prepared to fight hard all the way. So at least Christian found, and Faithful, and Old Honest, and Mr Stand-fast, and all that shining company. Yet who of them would

have wished it to be otherwise? "I am going to my Fathers," said Mr Valiant-for-truth, when he approached the River, "and tho' with great difficulty I am got hither, yet now I do not repent me of all the Trouble I have been at to arrive where I am. My Sword I give to him that shall succeed me in my Pilgrimage, and my Courage and Skill to him that can get it. My Marks and Scars I carry with me, to be a witness for me that I have fought his Battles who now will be my Rewarder."

Commenting on these words, Mr Shaw writes: "The heart vibrates like a bell to such utterances as this. To turn from it to 'Out, out, brief candle,' and 'The rest is silence,' and 'We are such stuff as dreams are made on; and our little life is rounded by a sleep,' is to turn from life, strength, resolution, morning air and eternal youth, to the terrors of a drunken nightmare."[1]

But there is something better than imagination, better even than courage, and that is *love*. Bunyan *yearned* over men. He felt that any device, even the cunningly contrived bait of allegory, was justified, if only he might lure men into the net of the Kingdom of God. A tale about lions and giants and castles and foul fiends? By all means, and the best of any such, if only he might persuade the fascinated reader to become a pilgrim himself, and seek the city that hath foundations, whose maker and builder is God. It is this spiritual solicitude for our highest welfare that endears Bunyan to us, and makes us,

[1] G. B. Shaw, *Dramatic Opinions and Essays*, vol. i. pp. 141-2. See also the trenchant paragraphs in the Preface to *Man and Superman*, pp. xxxi, xxxii.

after three hundred years, love him even more than we admire him. Is he not a kind of personal friend and brother to every one who knows him? Bunyan has rendered this incomparable service to all benighted travellers through the darkness of this world, that he has made shiningly clear to them the way that is called the Way of Holiness; and he has done it so well, and so wooingly, that the wayfaring man, even though a fool, need not err therein.

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